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PETR HEREL: THE ARTIST'S BOOK AS ABERRANT OBJECT

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#### Declaration of Originality

I, Ella Mary Elizabeth Morrison 2018, hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

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## **Petr Herel: the Artist's Book as Aberrant Object**



## **Abstract**

The principal innovation of this dissertation is to present the artist's book as aberrant object. This sustained investigation of the artist's book draws upon interdisciplinary theories from art history, anthropology, linguistics, economics, socio-cultural studies, and material studies to examine the artist's book's place in art history, its collection and display, and individual analysis. I contend that the artist's book, which defies institutional classification and sits outside of the canonical narrative of the history of art, provides a vital case study to question the inherent media bias towards traditional forms of painting and sculpture in collection, display, and discourse of contemporary art in our national cultural institutions and scholarship. The value of a critical engagement with aberrance is demonstrated by numerous case studies examining Petr Herel's books interwoven throughout this research. Combined, this dissertation presents a nonlinear narrative. Part One, comprising two chapters, sets a foundational understanding of the artist's book as aberrant object, before articulating a new experiential methodology necessary to engage with such works. Part Two, comprising three chapters, uses this identification of the aberrant object to expose new themes and unstudied concepts in Herel's work. This non-linearity intentionally reflects the interpretive process of circling around such material, and mirrors the way I think about the artist's book as a challenging, subjective object. With no concrete definition, and no prescribed start or endpoint, this dissertation identifies and engages with a necessarily nebulous interpretation of the artist's book.

I argue that the attribution of aberrance to the artist's book is not a pejorative, but a positive term that casts new light on why the artist's book sits so uncomfortably in art historical discourse. I demonstrate that rather than limiting analysis, examining aberrance generates room for contemporary experimentation that embraces qualities of tactility, emotion, and temporality that jar with conventional art histories. It is from this foundational idea of artist's book as aberrant object that I have examined Herel's work in relation to the encounter, Surrealism, the visual presence of text, and ideas of cartography and belonging. In writing the first comprehensive study of Petr Herel's artist book practice, I propose a new manner of analysing the artist's book with wider applications in contemporary object-based analysis.

## Contents

Introduction .....	7
Petr Herel: a biographical chronology.....	33
 <b>Part One: Methodology</b>	
Chapter One.....	43
Artist's Book: Aberrant Object	
Chapter Two .....	75
The Experience of the Encounter	
 <b>Part Two: Interpretation</b>	
Chapter Three.....	110
The Surreal Artist's Book	
Chapter Four.....	139
On Viewing Words	
Chapter Five.....	163
Cartography, Nostalgia, Way Finding and Nowhere	
Conclusion.....	197
Appendix .....	205
Image List.....	218
Bibliography .....	302

## Introduction

The title page of Petr Herel's *Carnet d'un Malade* (1979) is largely vacant (Fig. 1a). The page, oriented in landscape, is overwhelmingly white. This immediately draws my eye to the handwritten text nearing the upper right-hand corner. Written in dark blue ink is the book's title, which translates to 'notebook of a sickly person'. My eyes follow the swooping lines of the handwriting, noting the large slopes and angles created within such small forms. The word *malade*, written on its own line, is smudged. The blue ink becomes hazy, as if the word has been covered by a thin sheet, or rests just under an uppermost layer of the paper itself. The word appears to have been smudged in one action, suggesting the movement of a damp finger. The word bleeds out into the area around it. *Malade* is disintegrating, falling apart, slowly decaying, and losing its physical presence, as might the sickly person it describes. This extension out into the page makes what was before vacant now an important space that supports these words—white becomes an extension of blue. Focusing on this white mass, an embossed diagonal line appears, leading my eye from the title to the text below that notes the date. Following this more conventional inscription is an unexpected form: an ambiguous shape that is also bleeding. A book is supposed to communicate clear meaning, to be readable. Instead, on the very first page of this artist's book, Herel has left me staring into a void.

The artists' books of Czech-born Australian artist Petr Herel (1943-) are complex, challenging, and wondrous objects. They have been largely neglected by previous art historical discourse. Current scholarship on the artist's book is vague and contradictory, with specific analyses unable to articulate the subjective, experiential encounter evoked by Herel's work in hand. There is very little writing on the artist himself. Consequently, this dissertation not only brings to the fore an understudied artist, but also an understudied medium. It both proves and addresses the urgent need for a contemporary analysis of Herel's work and the artist's book more broadly. Using an innovative mix of contemporary, interdisciplinary methodologies and theory, I present a new manner to critically engage with the artist's book that brings together the experiential, phenomenological, and subjective qualities that, despite being intrinsic to the book as art object, have been omitted in previous scholarship. In writing the first comprehensive study of Herel's artist book practice, I propose a new manner of analysing the artist's book with wider applications in contemporary object-based analysis.

Underlying this new approach is my definition of the artist's book as aberrant object. To be aberrant is to "depart from an accepted standard".<sup>1</sup> The aberrant object can be understood as one "created through displacement".<sup>2</sup> It is an object removed from its original context, re-examined to create a new entity. In the case of Herel's work, the conventional, recognisable codex is transformed into a holistic art object. I argue that this attribution of aberrance is not a pejorative, but a positive term that casts new light on why the artist's book sits so uncomfortably in art historical discourse. I demonstrate that rather than limiting analysis, as has been the case in previous scholarship, examining aberrance generates room for contemporary experimentation that embraces qualities of tactility, emotion, and temporality that jar with conventional art histories. It is from this foundational idea of artist's book as aberrant object that I have examined Herel's work in relation to the encounter, Surrealism, the visual presence of text, and ideas of cartography and belonging.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation crucially undertakes an examination of the work of a largely under-studied artist, Petr Herel, and in doing so develops a new interpretive approach to the artist's book that is appropriately experiential, subjective, and phenomenological. It identifies a gap in literature discussing the artist's work, and demonstrates the urgency of such study due to Herel's status as a seminal figure in the dissemination of the artist's book in Australia through his oeuvre and teaching. As previous literature on the artist's book at large remains distracted by issues of definition, this dissertation argues that we must move past this tangled mire of confusion and stuffy reliance on outdated standards of unemotional and unfeeling objectivism to identify and engage with the artist's book as aberrant object.<sup>4</sup> Rather than finding previous literature restrictive, this dissertation uses discord to engage with the artist's book's challenging specificity as an object sitting in the liminal space between art and literature, demanding a new approach for the book as art object. The artist's book as aberrant object is unrestrained by conventional analysis, and indeed exposes the necessity of a new approach that embraces its inherent subjectivity, tactility, and engagement with the experience of the art object. This has generated a new analysis of Herel's work engaging with ideas of the encounter, the application of surreal concepts to

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<sup>1</sup> "Aberrant," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/aberrant>.

<sup>2</sup> Heide Museum of Modern Art, *The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada and Surrealism* (Bulleen: Museum of Modern Art at Heide), 23.

<sup>3</sup> The idea of aberrance in art is not a new one, however has not before been attributed specifically to the artist's book. Asserting the artist's book as art object in this dissertation was inspired by the Heide Museum of Modern Art exhibition catalogue *The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada and Surrealism* (1994), which touched upon ideas of psychoanalysis, fetishism, and femininity. Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Literature with conflicting, overarching and objective definitions of the artist's book will be discussed at length later in the Introduction.

the artist's book, a new formal analysis of text forms, and a discussion of nostalgia generated by the Herel's work in hand. This innovative discussion is supported by the demonstrated application of these new ideas in the analysis of numerous case studies from throughout Herel's artist book oeuvre. Not only does this dissertation put forward a new perspective of the artist's book that reinstates previously overlooked qualities inherent in Herel's work, it brings to the fore a contemporary approach applicable to the analysis of art objects more broadly.

Before examining previous scholarship on the artist's book through a critical lens, it is necessary to acknowledge the geographic bias within literature on the genre. Current art histories of the artist's book are primarily from the United States of America. As seminal specialist Johanna Drucker, herself an American, observes: "with Europeans taking second place; the artists of Asia, Africa, Australia, and South America are distinctly underrepresented".<sup>5</sup> It is important to recognise that the views expressed by this American literature are not held universally tightly, and though literature in the United States is more abundant, the genre has certainly enjoyed a rich lineage of European history and tradition.<sup>6</sup> As such, while a review of literature does reflect primarily American scholarship, the study of Herel in particular creates a new and necessary space to then move away from this lens and consider the artist's book from a more international perspective.<sup>7</sup> This seems only appropriate considering Herel's polyglot nature, having lived in multiple countries and speaking a variety of languages (see Biographical Chronology). This research marks an

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<sup>5</sup> Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1995), viii.

<sup>6</sup> Contrasting this American focus, Robert Flynn Johnson asserts "the collecting of artists' books in the twentieth century has been pursued far more enthusiastically in Europe than in the United States". Robert Flynn Johnson, "Reva and David Logan: An Appropriate Passion," in *Artists' Books in the Modern Era 1870-2000: The Reva and David Logan Collection of Illustrated Books* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 15.

The following are some of the few European publications regarding the artist's book:

Anne Moeglin-Delcroix et al., *Looking. Telling. Thinking. Collecting: Four Directions of the Artist's Book from the Sixties to the Present* (Mantova: Corraini Edizioni, 2004).

Bibliothèque Nationale, *Le Livre et L'artiste: Tendances Du Livre Illustré Français 1967.1976* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1977).

Bibliothèque Nationale, *50 Livres Illustrés Depuis 1947* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France et Centres national des lettres, 1988).

NRA Shakespeare international, *Livres D'artistes/ livres-Objets*, trans. Shelley Stroup (Paris: Editions CERPM, 1985).

It is also necessary to note specific focus on artist book scholarship in the United Kingdom, as demonstrated by publications including the biennial *Artist's Book Yearbook* (2001-), the journal *The Blue Notebook* (2006-), and the *Book Arts Newsletter* (2002-), all of which are edited by Sarah Bodman, Senior Research Fellow for Artists' Books at the Centre for Fine Print Research (CFPR) at the University of the West of England, Bristol.

See: "Book Arts," UWE Bristol: University of the West of England, 2018, <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/>.

<sup>7</sup> This international perspective is evident considering my focus upon Surrealism, and specifically Czech Surrealist artists; my choice of comparison between Herel's work and the work of European artists including Paul Klee and Luigi Serafini; and my established lack of interest in continuing with the current desire in literature to classify and categorise the artist's book, instead moving to examine such work in terms of individual response and affective qualities.

important contribution to a more open-minded understanding of the artist's book, facilitated by the work of a complex and international individual.

The lack of definitive starting point regarding a definition of the artist's book leads to divergent discussion that is too preoccupied with categorisation to engage in extended critical analyses.<sup>8</sup> Attempts to define the artist's book are varied, and articulated according to a wide variety of differing historical parameters and characteristics. Lucy Lippard asserts:

Neither an art book...nor a book on art...the artist's book is a work of art on its own, conceived specifically for the book form and often published by the artist him/herself.<sup>9</sup>

This mirrors the definition expressed by Drucker, identifying artists' books as "those self-identified artist-driven works in which the book form is central to the production of the piece".<sup>10</sup> Others similarly express a definition focussed on the book as art object and the artist's book creator as artist.<sup>11</sup>

While these definitions may seem to be fundamentally compatible, this is certainly not the case when examining the parameters influencing such conclusions. Informing these opinions is a densely populated crowd of different approaches. Clive Phillpot distinguishes different categories for artists' books, including "...assemblings and anthologies...visual poetry and wordworks...pageworks and mail art, book art and bookworks".<sup>12</sup> David Williams also states that the artist's book has many forms, but presents a list different to

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<sup>8</sup> This is certainly not to say that previous literature on the artist's book should be discredited, rather to point out that it has been unable to put forward a clear and unified definition. As each writer argues his or her own definition, or presents the artist's book as difficult to define without further discussion, so any attempt to begin analysis with a clear understanding becomes impossible.

<sup>9</sup> Lucy Lippard, "The Artist's Book Goes Public," in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Johanna Drucker, "Experimental Narrative and Artists' Books," *Journal of Artists Books* no. 12 (1999): 6.

<sup>11</sup> This includes the likes of Dick Higgins, Nancy Linn, Clive Phillpot, and Alex Selenitsch. The Getty Institute similarly defines artists' books as: "Books, whether unique items or multiples, made or conceived by artists, including commercial publications (usually in limited editions), as well as unique items formed or arranged by the artist".

"Artists' Books," *Art & Architecture Thesaurus* (The Getty Institute, 2017),

[http://www.getty.edu/vow/AATFullDisplay?find=artist%27s+book&logic=AND&note=&english=N&prev\\_page=1&subjectid=300123016](http://www.getty.edu/vow/AATFullDisplay?find=artist%27s+book&logic=AND&note=&english=N&prev_page=1&subjectid=300123016).

Dick Higgins, "A Preface," in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), 11.

Nancy Linn, "Women Artists' Books," *Woman's Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 1982): 27.

Clive Phillpot, "Books by Artists and Books as Art," in *Artist/author: Contemporary Artists' Books*, Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot (New York: Distributed Art Publishers & American Federation of Arts, 1998), 33.

Alex Selenitsch, *Australian Artists Books* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2008), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Phillpot, op cit., 37.

Phillpot's: "hand printed *livre d'artiste*, unique copy, assemblage, offset, digital, virtual or limited edition".<sup>13</sup> Des Cowley and Claire Williamson more generally state:

...the production of artist's books has grown dramatically to encompass all manners of mediums and formats, from fine press editions to inexpensive multiples to altered or sculptural books to installations.<sup>14</sup>

Attempting to close in on a clear definition, such lists instead grow to be too large for comprehension. Instead of solving the issue, they contribute to it; attempts at clarity create opacity.

Cowley and Williamson's reference to limited editions brings to light another key issue in defining the artist's book regarding accessibility and dissemination. *Carnet d'un Malade* is one of two unique impressions, and reflects the tendency for small editions within Herel's practice.<sup>15</sup> Some believe that the artist's book's "often inexplicable air of power, attraction, or uniqueness" is due to this limited edition.<sup>16</sup> Yet others deny this as an intrinsic quality of the genre, labelling the decision to create a limited edition the result of 'bibliophilisation'.<sup>17</sup> This perspective suggests that the artist's book, once accessible, has become an esoteric object through limited edition. Yet artists Peter Lyssiotis and Monica Oppen challenge this with another perspective, claiming a limited edition is in fact a reflection of the artist's resources, "financial, physical, psychological".<sup>18</sup> While Jérôme Dupeyrat claims that the distribution of the artist's book is a defining factor, there is subsequently no clear idea to be gleaned from his writing as to what the essential characterises of this distribution are.<sup>19</sup> Further exacerbating this discord are voices like that of Nancy Linn, who simply states: "the artist's book is not defined by how it is made or produced".<sup>20</sup> There are no clear rules regarding the accessibility and dissemination of the artist's book, contributing to an uncomfortable lack of clear definition.

Attempts to define the artist's book by situating it within a historical context only work to further reiterate its aberrant status. I argue that this discord stems largely from debate as to

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<sup>13</sup> David Williams, "Introduction," in *Edition + Artist Book Survey, 1996 - 2002: Canberra Museum and Gallery, 7 September - 24 November 2002* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2002), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Des Cowley and Clare Williamson, *The World of the Book* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2007), 212.

<sup>15</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, November 5, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1995), 93.

<sup>17</sup> Anne Moeglin-Delcroix argues that before this phenomenon, the artist's book was essentially, and characteristically: "materially unpretentious...easy to circulate, [and] accessible".

Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, "Remakes, Regresses, (Re)prints," *Journal of Artists Books* no. 37 (2015): 5.

<sup>18</sup> Monica Oppen and Peter Lyssiotis, *The Silent Scream: Political and Social Comment in Books by Artists* (Petersham, NSW: Ant Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Jérôme Dupeyrat, "Publishing Art," *Journal of Artists Books* no. 37 (2015): 33.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Linn, "Women Artists' Books," *Woman's Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 1982): 27.

the relationship between the artist's book and the *livre d'artiste*.<sup>21</sup> Phillpot asserts the *livre d'artiste* is "an old artist's book".<sup>22</sup> Others acknowledge the influence of the *livre d'artiste* on contemporary artist book practice, noting historical precedence.<sup>23</sup> While this statement may seem simple, it is contested. For Drucker, associating the artist's book with the *livre d'artiste* is likening it to a "tradition of the illustrated book," and is cause for confusion.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, she asserts that while *livres d'artiste* were a significant development in the twentieth century, they lacked the conceptual quality inherent to the artist's book, and makers were not conscious of the book as form.<sup>25</sup>

Working to place Herel's work within a recent history of the artist's book exposes additional dissonance. Many writers date the rise of the contemporary artist's book to the 1960s.<sup>26</sup> While flagging the 1960s, David Jury labels this decade as a period of "re-emergence," also noting significant activity in the 1920s.<sup>27</sup> Drucker identifies the mid-1940s as a time of "particularly marked development".<sup>28</sup> Closer to home, Noreen Grahame writes

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<sup>21</sup> The *livre d'artiste* is a French genre from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which artists created visual imagery for literary publication considered works in their own right.

Eleanor M. Garvey and Peter A. Wick, *The Arts of the French Book: 1900-1965* (Dallas: Smu Press, 1967), 13.

W.J Strachan, *The Artist and the Book in France* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), 22.

The thorough examination of the *livre d'artiste* merits a dissertation in its own right, and will only be used here in relation to attempts to historically contextualise the artist's book.

<sup>22</sup> Clive Phillpot, "Books by Artists and Books as Art," in *Artist/author: Contemporary Artists' Books*, Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot (New York: Distributed Art Publishers & American Federation of Arts, 1998), 33.

<sup>23</sup> This includes the likes of Noreen Grahame, Lucy Lippard, Peter Di Sciasco, Alex Selenitsch, and Martha Wilson (note I have grouped together references to the largely similar French *livres d'artiste*, *livres de peintres* and *éditions du luxe*).

Noreen Grahame, "Beware Books by Artists," in *Artists' Books Fair '94: State Library of Queensland, 24 and 25 September 1994* (Milton, QLD: Numero Uno, 1994), 1.

Lucy Lippard, "The Artist's Book Goes Public," in *Artist/author: Contemporary Artists' Books*, Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot (New York: Distributed Art Publishers & American Federation of Arts, 1998), 45.

Thomas Paddon, "An Interview with Martha Wilson," in *Artist/author: Contemporary Artists' Books*, Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot (New York: Distributed Art Publishers & American Federation of Arts, 1998), 109.

Peter Di Sciasco, "Artists' Books: A World of Openings," *University of Melbourne Collections*, no. 6 (June 2010): 17.

Alex Selenitsch, *Australian Artists Books* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2008), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1995), 2.

Interestingly, Noreen Grahame comments that as of 1994, in Australia "the term 'artists' books' [was] ...being used to describe the open ended-editions, the *livre d'artiste* as well as a vast variety of other publications by artists".

Grahame, op cit., 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Drucker, op cit., 3-4.

Drucker makes what she states a 'simple distinction': "an artist's book should be a work by an artist self-conscious about the book form, rather than merely a highly artistic book".

Ibid., 21.

<sup>26</sup> Those who identify the 1960s as a key point include Jérôme Dupeyrat, Lucy Lippard, Alex Selenitsch, and Peter Di Sciasco.

Jérôme Dupeyrat, "Publishing Art," *Journal of Artists Books* no. 37 (2015): 32.

Lucy Lippard, "Conspicuous Consumption: New Artists' Books," in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), 50.

Selenitsch, op cit., 6.

Di Sciasco, op cit., 14.

<sup>27</sup> David Jury, "Introduction," in *Book Art Object*, ed. David Jury (California: The Codex Foundation, 2008), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Johanna Drucker, op cit., 1.



of the Australian artist's book as experiencing a "heady time" in the 1970s.<sup>29</sup> Finally, writing of the contemporary artist's book in France, Antoine Coron argues that the genre might be contemporary, but has inextricably historical roots: "...there is no revolution in this field, but instead a continuity that goes back a long way".<sup>30</sup> Also flagging a more historical precedence is Herel himself. The artist identifies his own important milestone in the development of the artist's book: Symbolism, thus dragging the discussion of historical context back into the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> By reviewing these different perspectives together, one is explicitly confronted with the truth that the history of the artist's book is a contested area, and historical understanding is subjective itself, reflecting whether one believes the contemporary artist's book a new art form or a continuation of the historical.

To confuse attempts at a general understanding even further, there are scholars who choose to define the artist's book not by what it is, but by what it is not.<sup>32</sup> Drucker states that the artist's book is not a *livre d'artiste*.<sup>33</sup> Leszek Brogowski states "an artist's book isn't a museum in miniature, it's not a new artistic language, it's not a new artistic form...it calls into question art in all of its complexity".<sup>34</sup> And while he does suggest a loose definition, Gary Catalano (who published the first of two Australian publications on the artist's book in 1983) writes more of what the artist's book is not than what it is.<sup>35</sup> Catalano contends "the contemporary history of visual arts is rich in paradox, and nowhere more so than where artists' books are concerned".<sup>36</sup> From his perspective, the artist's book is not an art book; the artist's book is not a limited edition publication including illustrations; the artist's book is not a folio.<sup>37</sup> While this approach might have the very best of intentions to elucidate the artist's book, it further obfuscates understanding—to constructively comprehend what the artist's book is not, one surely needs a clear idea first of what it is.

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<sup>29</sup> Noreen Grahame, "A Small Box of Books," in *Une Histoire Du Livre D'Artiste Australien* (Paddington, QLD: grahame galleries + editions, 2016), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Antoine Coron, "Publishing Artist Books in France Today," in *Book Art Object 2: Second Catalogue of the Codex Foundation Biennial International Book Exhibition and Symposium, Berkeley, 2011*, David Jury and Peter Rutledge Koch (California: The Codex Foundation, 2013), 55.

<sup>31</sup> Herel writes: "The dream of a book as *opus magnus* was reborn with the Symbolists late in the last century. Since then artists have dreamed about the book as a tactile metaphor for the intrinsic self". Petr Herel, "Where the Language Stops," in *Artists' Books and Limited Editions* (Canberra: Canberra Institute of Art, Graphic Design Workshop, 1992), 5.

<sup>32</sup> As Drucker observes: "...there are no specific criteria for defining what an artist's book is, but there are many criteria for defining what it is not, or what it partakes of, or what it distinguishes itself from". Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1995), 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Leszek Brogowski and Hubert Renard, "What the Artist's Book Makes Us Rethink About Esthetic Theory," *Journal of Artists Books* no. 37 (2015): 14.

<sup>35</sup> The second publication is Alex Selenitsch's *Australian Artists Books*, published in 2008. Alex Selenitsch, *Australian Artists Books* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Gary Catalano, *The Bandaged Image: A Study of Australian Artists' Books* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983), 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

It is important to note that there is some literature identifying the ‘grey’ nature of defining the artist’s book. Dick Higgins comments “a firm definition will, by its nature, serve only to exclude many artists’ books...”<sup>38</sup> Drucker, though explicitly arguing her own perspective, acknowledges that such debate: “...show[s] the immediate difficulty of trying to make a single, simple statement about what constitutes an artist’s book”.<sup>39</sup> Australian practitioner and academic Alex Selenitsch uses this sense of grey to shape his conception of the genre more broadly: “in a sense, the artist’s book might be thought of as a book that expands our ideas of what an artist’s book might be”.<sup>40</sup> Such acknowledgements of the ambiguity of the artist’s book clearly demonstrate the need for a new manner of approaching such objects that does not become bogged down by convention. While these assertions of ambiguity are present in literature, without then continuing to articulate what a new examination of the artist’s book might resemble, they fall short, trapped in an embryonic state. This thesis builds from previous opacity to clearly and comprehensively demonstrate how a new approach, inspired by accepting the aberrantly ambiguous, can be applied to analyse the artist’s book in hand.<sup>41</sup>

Herel has his own opinion as to what constitutes an artist’s book. In May 2015, the artist commented that he was not concerned with making specific distinctions.<sup>42</sup> In his opinion, such an object is, simply, an original book containing original prints.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Herel places a personal emphasis upon the “traditional organisation” of the book, reflecting the sensitivity his work evokes for the historical codex form. In his opinion, the artist’s book is fundamentally the artist’s own creation “from beginning to end”.<sup>44</sup> Later in 2015, Herel commented that in the past people have been driven to seek background information, jumping from source to source; he comments: “you can make whatever links you like, but...”<sup>45</sup> By leaving this comment open ended, Herel reiterates the impossibility of one clear definition of the artist’s book. As such, Herel’s ethos is arguably that artists’ books are intimate acts of creation that are dependent on the individual rather than a uniform approach.

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<sup>38</sup> Dick Higgins, “A Preface,” in *Artists’ Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), 11.

<sup>39</sup> Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists’ Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1995), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Alex Selenitsch, *Australian Artists Books* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2008), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Ward Tietz writes in support of using the artist’s book’s ambiguity to free oneself of conventional methodologies: “Such contestation is important because it allows artists’ books and other liminal or hybrid forms to demonstrate a condition where aesthetic value is not categorically determined”.

Ward Tietz, “Artists’ Books: Between Viewing and Reading,” *Journal of Artists’ Books*, no. 21 (2007): 17.

<sup>42</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, August 2015.

Compared to the artist's book in general, there is less literature written about the history of the genre specifically in an Australian context. This could be the result of the artist's book being absorbed into a larger history of Australian print culture. Sasha Grishin observes:

The modern artist's book in Australia has been something of a Cinderella of the art forms. Although isolated examples may go back for the best part of a century, as an art form, the artist's book in Australia did not become popular during the period of assimilation of European modernism.<sup>46</sup>

Selenitsch notes that there are few specific 'book artists' in the Australasia region.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps this lack of widespread popularity has been a previous factor negating Australia-centric literature on the artist's book.

Applying a critical lens to scholarship on the artist's book, and Herel's work specifically, supports this dissertation's new articulation of the artist's book as aberrant object. As can be ascertained by attempts to understand the artist's book using conventional approaches of definition, key characteristics, and history, Herel's work exposes the necessity of a contemporary approach to the artist's book that critically engages with the uncomfortable. The artist's book demonstrably refuses to be placed within a conventional box, and so any further attempts to do so are futile and unsatisfactory. In this sense, Herel's work becomes a case study that challenges and subsequently uproots historical object analysis in art history. This research marks an important departure from the inadequate approach to objects that do not fit neatly within the need to immediately understand.

Despite a lack of scholarly literature on the interpretation of the artist's book, there is a notable group of individuals and institutions that reflect growing Australian interest in the genre. Artists such as Aleks Danko, Caren Florance, Dianne Fogwell, Petr Herel, Robert Jacks, Bruno Leti, Peter Lyssiotis, Bea Maddock, Monica Oppen, Alex Selenitsch, and others, have individually contributed to an Australian artist's book presence. As have independent publishers and private presses such as Brindabella Press, founded by Alec Bolton in 1972, Lyrebird Press, founded in 1977 by Tate Adams and George Baldessin, and Finlay Press, founded by Phil Day and Ingeborg Hansen—both graduates of Herel's Graphic Investigation Workshop. The private press Ampersand Duck (2004-) was also founded by fellow alumna Caren Florance. Robert Heather (once director of Artspace Mackay, Queensland), Noreen Grahame (of Grahame Galleries + Editions, Brisbane, and

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<sup>46</sup> Sasha Grishin, "Fragile Objects: Artists' Books and Portfolios by the Graphic Investigation Workshop," in *Artists' Books and Limited Editions* (Canberra: Canberra Institute of Art, Graphic Design Workshop, 1992), 10.

<sup>47</sup> Alex Selenitsch, *Australian Artists Books* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2008), 10.

founder of the Centre for the Artist Book), and Noel Sheridan (once director of the Experimental Art Foundation, now the Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide), have actively celebrated the artist's book through exhibition, conferences and dedicated collection.<sup>48</sup> Institutional figures including Roger Butler and Anne Gray at the National Gallery of Australia, Des Cowley at the State Library of Victoria, and Philip Jackson at the National Library of Australia work to ensure that artists' books are represented in national collections. Since 2000, a dedicated collection of artists' books can also be found at the Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.<sup>49</sup> This demonstrated interest in the Australian artist's book reiterates the need for the extended academic discourse on the genre this dissertation provides.

A comprehensive study of Herel's artist book practice is especially necessary as the artist has been a seminal contributor to the genre within Australia not only through his practice but also his teaching. Under the directorship of Udo Sellbach (1927-2006), Herel was founding head of the Graphic Investigation Workshop at the Canberra School of Art from 1979 to 1998.<sup>50</sup> The Workshop was created in response to a developing attitude of drawing as an autonomous activity, celebrating the technique's ambiguity.<sup>51</sup> From this, students experimented with response to literary inspiration, and developed an "outstanding record for the production of artists' books", leading the Workshop to become an internationally recognised endeavour.<sup>52</sup> Herel actively encouraged students to extend drawing beyond conventional illustration, using it to instead engage with larger metaphysical issues of being.<sup>53</sup> By avoiding the literal nature of illustration, students were able to experiment, indeed investigate, affective experience.<sup>54</sup> The book form was appropriately temporal, experiential, and personal. In interview, Herel comments that a primary focus of his teaching at the Workshop was to provoke student imaginations "not only to make images but to read".<sup>55</sup> Literary inspiration and references were encouraged in the curriculum, and the artist's book provided an appropriate medium to engage simultaneously with the literary and the visual. Acknowledging Herel's seminal presence in the development of the Australian artist's book further justifies the necessity of a scholarly study of his work.

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<sup>48</sup> Sarah Bodman, "Artists' Books in Australia," *Journal of Artists Books* no. 31 (2012): 16-21.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Di Sciasco, "Artists' Books: A World of Openings," *University of Melbourne Collections*, no. 6 (June 2010): 15.

<sup>50</sup> Sasha Grishin, "Catalogue Essay," in *Petr Herel: Písmo Duše: A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 50.

<sup>51</sup> Pat Gilmour, "Introduction," in *Graphic Investigation Workshop 1978-1988* (Canberra: CITA, 1988), 7.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Grishin, op cit., 50.

<sup>53</sup> Gilmour, op cit., 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>55</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, August 2015.

Current discourse on the artist's book generates a fractured, conflicted, and ultimately unsatisfactory understanding of the genre. A new approach is necessary; one that addresses methods of interpretation and analysis rather than being distracted by preliminary labelling. This research presents a contemporary manner of approaching the artist's book as aberrant object, thus negating the need for focus upon a clear definition applicable to all such works, and instead focussing on the experiential and phenomenological qualities that make these works so challenging. Having outlined prior confusion, crossover, and debate, this dissertation demonstrates its innovation in several ways: it does not become bogged down by asserting positive classifications; it not only identifies a gap in literature but grows from the complexities of said gap; and it examines the work of a founding figure of the artist's book in Australia in such a way that can also be applied to other artists' books and art objects more generally. This dissertation presents a significant contribution to discourse on the artist's book from microcosm to macrocosm.

While I have established that attempting to define the artist's book is challenging, previous literature does suggest two important characteristics of the genre developed by this dissertation. These concepts—the relationship between image and text, and temporality—have been key in my development of this new approach. Importantly, they can also be identified as factors contributing to the aberrant nature of the artist's book. In a May 2015 interview with the artist, Herel commented that, in an artist's book, creating imagery that is illustrative of the text is “something for the artist to avoid”.<sup>56</sup> Instead, he believes that the interaction between visual and literary should more abstractly reflect the act of reading.<sup>57</sup> Herel's artists' books do not include images that are literal illustrations, but instead a response to the feelings evoked by reading the text. There is no hierarchy between the written word and image, one does not ‘accompany’ the other; instead, the two elements interact with each other to create a larger poetic space. This attitude mirrors those expressed within literature on the artist's book. Selenitsch emphasises that artists' books “invariably avoid the banality of illustrated texts or pictures with captions”.<sup>58</sup> While in a conventional book text and image may be identified as separate elements of the codex, in the artist's book they are inextricably woven; a holistic expression.<sup>59</sup> The artist's book

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<sup>56</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Alex Selenitsch, “Across the Imagination,” in *Edition + Artist Book Survey, 1996 - 2002 : Canberra Museum and Gallery, 7 September - 24 November 2002* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2002), 1.

Selenitsch has also explicitly expressed that “art books and illustrated books are essentially different to artists' books,” from which one can assume the illustrative qualities of the latter are not a feature of the artist's book. Alex Selenitsch, *Australian Artists Books* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2008), 6.

<sup>59</sup> Shelley Rice argues that the artist's book represents a “new form of visual literature...playing with traditional notions of the relationship between image and text”.

makes demands of the viewer, imploring them to become conscious of how conventional reading habits and ideas of the book are challenged when engaging with such an object.

My research contends that this liminality is another factor contributing to the articulation of artist's book as aberrant object. Jae Rossman postulates that the 'bookwork' "derives much of its power from its existence on the threshold of two worlds".<sup>60</sup> The two worlds Rossman refers to are that of literary text and visual art.<sup>61</sup> Ward Tietz too makes mention of the liminality of the artist's book and its position within art, stating that such works "achieve their final coherence in this space between viewing and reading".<sup>62</sup> Both of these commentaries are positive ones, and by using words like 'power', 'achieve' and 'coherence' emphasise this liminality's significance. Yet such previous literature has not gone on to then demonstrate the inclusion of this liminal quality in tangible analysis.

Perhaps Phillpot correctly expresses previous issues with handling the in-between-ness of the artist's book, attributing to them a "mongrel nature" that results from sitting at a "junction where art, documentation, and literature all come together".<sup>63</sup> In a 2016 letter discussing audience, Herel himself comments that in resting between art and literature, the artist's book also sits in between an art audience, and an audience of readers.<sup>64</sup> In Herel's eyes, this threshold quality creates issues considering who the artist's book appeals to and how they might go about interpreting it: "the 'art audience' is not necessarily orientated towards reading and 'readers' are not necessarily enthusiastic art viewers".<sup>65</sup> My research draws from such ideas of the artist's book as liminal object, first examining the aberrance this creates in relation to collection, display, and value, before demonstrating interpretation that embraces the idea of artist's book as object in-between.

Temporality is the second key element of the artist's book drawn from previous literature, and is identified as significant by the artist himself. Herel states that the most important aspect of engaging with the artist's book is the experience of a 'private space', created by

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Shelley Rice, "Word and Images: Artists' Books as Visual Literature," in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Joan Lyons (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985), 59.

Robert Bringhurst interprets this interweaving of image and text as a dynamic, living form, attributing such books to be "full of life". Importantly, Bringhurst comments that the imagery and textual elements of one page are not only woven with each other, but engage with those found on other pages: "When you're out of your room, the images and ideas may be crawling around in the dark, mating, feeding..."

Robert Bringhurst, "Spiritual Geometry: the Book as a Work of Art," in *Book Art Object*, ed. David Jury (California: The Codex Foundation, 2008), 80.

<sup>60</sup> Jae Rossman, "Reading Outside the Lines: Paratextual Analysis and Artists' Books," *Journal of Artists Books* Spring 2008, no. 23 (2008): 30–41, 31.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ward Tietz, "Artists' Books: Between Viewing and Reading," *Journal of Artists' Books*, no. 21 (2007): 17.

<sup>63</sup> Clive Phillpot, "Books by Artists and Books as Art," in *Artist/author: Contemporary Artists' Books*, Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot (New York: Distributed Art Publishers & American Federation of Arts, 1998), 33.

<sup>64</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, January 30, 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

the individual's self-determined turning of pages and journey into the space of the book.<sup>66</sup> The conventional book is one that has a 'regular timing'—readers have come to habitually expect the 'repetitive pacing and repetitive structure' of a textual communication of semantic meaning.<sup>67</sup> However artists like Herel who engage with the book as art object challenge this conventional pace. The temporality of their work is not separated clearly by pages, chapters, or even start and finish, instead becoming "a stretched membrane of continuity" as viewers move their way through the pages in a self-driven performance.<sup>68</sup>

The artist's book 'evolves in time', with no clear interpretive path.<sup>69</sup> This dissertation applies this temporality to articulate 'the experience of the encounter' fundamental to interpreting the artist's book. Phil Jones suggests that viewers could think of the book as "a slice of time/space".<sup>70</sup> This encourages a slower paced interactive experience with the book, and inspires interpreters to become aware of their presence in the activation of the artist's book.<sup>71</sup> To engage with the artist's book is to experience, to encounter. Specifically regarding the analysis of this temporal quality, Charles Alexander states:

The language of normative criticism is not geared towards the discussion of an experience, which is the main focus of most artists' books.<sup>72</sup>

Here, Alexander identifies an issue with analysing the artist's book using old methodologies. Interacting with *Carnet d'un Malade* is a temporal experience, and calls for subjective, experiential interpretation previously underdeveloped in art historical discourse. Yet again, though identifying an obstacle in attempting to analyse the artist's book conventionally, Alexander does not continue from this to develop a new approach. My research articulates 'the experience of the encounter', and tangibly demonstrates how an informed, art historical analysis of encountering the artist's book can be structured.

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<sup>66</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Johanna Drucker, "Experimental Narrative and Artists' Books," *Journal of Artists Books* no. 12 (1999): 20.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Gary Catalano, *The Bandaged Image: A Study of Australian Artists' Books* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983), 84.

<sup>70</sup> Phil Jones, "The Book as a Tunnel," in *The Open Book Project* (Michigan: Eastern Michigan University Galleries, 2014), 121.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Boyle observes: "there is a unique pleasure in holding a well made artist book and an awareness of the passing of time as the contents of the book are slowly revealed," emphasising the "close communication that the handmade book engenders between the maker and the reader".

Susan Boyle, "The Artist Book," in *Undercover: Artist Books* (Wollongong: University of Wollongong, 2004), 3. Rossman also references the specific temporality of the artist's book, and posits: "while all books are temporal devices, artists' books often use a delayed sense of time to allow the reader to interact more thoroughly and purposefully..."

Jae Rossman, "Reading Outside the Lines: Paratextual Analysis and Artists' Books," *Journal of Artists Books* Spring 2008, no. 23 (2008): 33.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Alexander, "Introduction," in *Talking the Boundless Book: Art, Language, and the Book Arts: Essays from "Art & Language, Re-Reading the Boundless Book,"* Charles Alexander (Minneapolis: Minnesota Center for Book Arts, 1995), 20.

This dissertation does not propose its own concrete definition of the artist's book by articulating the artist's book as aberrant object. Rather, it uses this attribution to identify and discuss discord in literature, collection and display to argue that the artist's book's liminal qualities challenge conventional approaches to the art object. The artist's book defies clear-cut classification. Consequently, when beginning to analyse the artist's book, the art historian should not rely solely on positive knowledge but instead apply the informed experiential, subjective and temporal methods put forward throughout this dissertation. This new attitude presents the opportunity to include interdisciplinary theories of material culture studies, psychology, anthropology and literature to analysis of the artist's book, engaging with the genre through a phenomenological lens. The artist's book is a site ripe for contemporary analytical experimentation, and calls for the development of a new way to engage with difficult objects.<sup>73</sup> This research presents a new methodology with which to analyse the artist's book, specifically influenced by the writing of T.J. Clark and Jennifer Roberts, who have each championed contemporary temporal approaches to art object analysis.<sup>74</sup> I argue that the application of temporal methodologies to Herel's work is necessary to understanding, providing an innovative way to engage with the subjective, experiential qualities of the artist's book.

Though the scant literature on Herel's books does attempt to articulate the intimate specificity of his work, it does not then enter into a study of the artist's book informed by this intimate quality. Grishin identifies Herel as "a traveller through meta-physical realities".<sup>75</sup> Gray also expresses the presence of the transcendental, commenting that Herel's work engages with "personal exploration".<sup>76</sup> In her recent paper on Labyrinth

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<sup>73</sup> Laurence Corbel asserts that "...one may think that what makes artists' books problematic for institutionalization [or, as this thesis posits, interpretation more broadly] is what makes them all the more interesting for study: it allows one to leave the beaten path of art...and especially to consider looking at research in a new way, in an oblique relation to the academic setting, that meets appropriately rigorous research requirements while preserving the irreducible specificity of artists' books".

Mirroring other literature, Corbel does not then continue on to demonstrate this 'oblique' study in practice, but the sentiment of experimentation and call for a new manner with which to engage with difficult objects rings true to the aims of this dissertation.

Laurence Corbel, "Design, Publish, and Display: The Triptych for University Research into Artist's Books," *Journal of Artists Books* no. 37 (2015): 35.

<sup>74</sup> T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Jennifer Roberts, "The Power of Patience," *Harvard Magazine*, December 2013, <http://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience>.

<sup>75</sup> Sasha Grishin, "Catalogue Essay," in *Petr Herel: Pismo Duše: A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 5.

In another text, Grishin and Nancy Sever note the interaction in Herel's artist book practice between 'internal dialogue' and 'external observed world'.

Sasha Grishin and Nancy Sever, *First Canberra Drawing Biennale* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1996), 8.

<sup>76</sup> Gray writes that Herel's "art is a reflection of his total experience, things seen, things remembered, and things felt".

Anne Gray, *Petr Herel: An Exhibition of Artists Books at the National Library of Australia 22 March-30 June 1989* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1989), 9.



Press, Frédérique Martin-Scherrer writes that Herel is a “poet in his field”.<sup>77</sup> Labyrinth Press collaborator Thierry Bouchard (1954-2008) observes that Herel’s books are original forms from another world.<sup>78</sup> Grishin again articulates:

The word ‘magic’ is unfashionable in art criticism, yet, probably better than any other, it describes the precious quality in Petr Herel’s work.<sup>79</sup>

Commentary on the experiential qualities of Herel’s work identifies an important aspect of the artist’s work, and even notes the uncomfortable place of such qualities in discourse. Yet it still does not proceed to demonstrate how one might work to override ideas of the ‘unfashionable’ and shape an appropriately poetic examination of the artist’s work. This dissertation uses this superficial commentary as a platform from which to undertake a comprehensive study of Herel’s work informed by analysis that specifically focuses upon an engagement with the intimate presence of the artist’s book. To be liminal, to be poetic, and to be aberrant is not to be ineffable.

Having identified the artist’s book as aberrant object, and then exposed the necessity for a new experiential approach to the artist’s book, this dissertation then answers the question: how we can record and analyse the subjective experience of the phenomenological art object in an objective and scholarly way? Rather than labelling the artist’s book simply a poetic object, this research tangibly demonstrates how analysis engaging with this poeticism can be undertaken and then analysed to reveal the valuable evidence this experimentation provides.

During an interview at his house in Melbourne, Herel discloses the highly personal circumstances of *Carnet d’un Malade*’s creation. In 1978, the artist suffered an emotional breakdown and became unable to speak.<sup>80</sup> Pen and paper became his primary method of communication. Learning this, I examine the book for an extended period, and find myself returning to a particular page (Fig. 1b-c). It features a rectangular block of horizontal lines, reminiscent of those within a notebook. Consequently, I expect to be able to read the text written along these lines. The handwritten words are composed of small, angular letters.

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<sup>77</sup> Frédérique Martin-Scherrer, “Thierry Bouchard et Petr Herel : Une Création Partagée,” *TextImage, Bibliothèque Jean Doucet Collectionneurs Bibliophiles* (2015), [http://www.revue-textimage.com/13\\_poesie\\_image/martin-scherrer1.html](http://www.revue-textimage.com/13_poesie_image/martin-scherrer1.html).

<sup>78</sup> Thierry Bouchard, “Pour Petr Herel,” in *Petr Herel : Bibliothèque de Beaune, Janvier-Fevrier 1988, Livres D’artiste & Livres Edites Par Thierry Bouchard*, Petr Herel and Thierry Bouchard (Beaune: Bibliotheque de Beaune, 1987), 10.

<sup>79</sup> Sasha Grishin, “Fragile Objects: Artists’ Books and Portfolios by the Graphic Investigation Workshop,” in *Artists’ Books and Limited Editions* (Canberra: Canberra Institute of Art, Graphic Design Workshop, 1992), 11.

<sup>80</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

Sasha Grishin, “Catalogue Essay,” in *Petr Herel : Pismo Duše : A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 33.

Leaning forward, I find that despite my focus I cannot read them. Though featuring letters and accents that are reminiscent of English and European languages, this is where any relation to traditional reading ends. This text is one that has only its roots in being literal, with Herel creating a script of his own that suggests visual, rather than semantic, meaning. The artist presents the viewer with an unknowable, unreadable language. This writing is Herel's only means of communication, yet denies conventional understanding.

In the middle of the lined block is a form that resembles a figure, limbs bound. This person might be trapped under restraining lines, or resting on top of the ground they provide. Spending more time with the page, I come to wonder if this distorted figure is instead wading, its movement causing the surrounding lines, now water, to ripple. Or perhaps this form represents movement through uncooperative seas, and these moving lines are actually the shape of forceful currents that batter the body. The body battered, the body challenged, the body in the hands of the elements: an ill person.

The temporal approaches I apply to interpretation of the artist's book include slow looking and repeated viewing, undertaken in this research as experiments to critically analyse results as primary evidence. Informed by the work of Jennifer Roberts, the application of slow looking to artist book analysis engages with the temporal experience of Herel's work.<sup>81</sup> To undertake an experiment in slow looking, the viewer is required to relax the tempo of their viewing and spend an extended period of time with a work (Roberts suggests three hours).<sup>82</sup> This time is necessary to understanding the artist's book as Herel's practice demands the viewer spend time moving through a work, engaging with the book in a non-linear manner with no clear beginning or end point. As demonstrated by the excerpt above, through an exercise in slow looking at *Carnet d'un Malade* I was able to not only note evocative pages, but then analyse in detail why they were particularly compelling, beginning to touch upon ideas of the visual qualities of text and feelings of belonging that would later inform chapters within this dissertation. Using even a small excerpt from an experiment of slow looking, it is obvious that to employ merely a quick glance is to negate the individually driven experience of the artist's book.

*Carnet d'un Malade* was created during a time in which Herel was particularly conscious of language's power—the power of words to not only clearly communicate a message, but to mark a presence. The words in this book cannot be read, and yet visually depict a personal meditation on existence. The ineffable, the internal, is made a tangible and external

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<sup>81</sup> Jennifer L. Roberts, "The Power of Patience," *Harvard Magazine* (November-December 2013): <http://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience>.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

expression. Instead of sharing a concrete message with the viewer, Herel leads them to question other ways that meaning might be expressed, challenging the expected promise of a book to communicate a clear message, and the assumption that an individual in this circumstance would write to communicate with clarity. Yet rather than using the pen to express a need for food, water, or to hold an explicit conversation, Herel invites the viewer into his subconscious. I am presented with another form of communication that, while not conveying a solely semantic meaning, can still be described as coherent, articulate and eloquent. *Carnet d'un Malade* is demonstrably an intimate, temporal work. I begin to question the very act of reading and viewing, and my participation in such acts. This book is not contained within an explicitly flagged beginning and end, instead allowing me to move through it and return to pages in a non-chronological fashion. Even then, to close the book is not to finish it—I have returned to it several times.

Repeated viewing is another technique innovatively applied by this dissertation to analyse the experience of encountering Herel's work. Like slow looking, and indeed the artist's book itself, this approach is one that challenges the viewer to an exercise in duration. Informed by T.J. Clark's text *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (2006), this dissertation demonstrates the interpretive data to be gained from habitually returning to analyse a single work.<sup>83</sup> Repeated viewing transforms the singular moment of encounter into an extended experience, providing the opportunity to analyse a book not only for the physical qualities, imagery and iconography it suggests in a single sitting but in relation to larger metaphysical preoccupations thematically prevalent within Herel's oeuvre. As is evident when analysing the excerpt above, repeated viewing allows the viewer to expand interpretation from a focus on particular physical details to a nebulous, self-conscious examination of interpretation itself. The ability to relate the artist's book to larger questions of existence is particularly relevant to Herel's work as it engages with the artist's own lifelong thematic interrogation of time, reality, and existence.<sup>84</sup> The application of both slow looking and repeated viewing to the interpretation of Herel's work importantly reinstates the experience of the art object.

This dissertation sustains an experiential interpretation of the artist's book through the use of first person. This decision is bold, and a marked departure from previous art histories that employ a formal tone to maintain objectivity.<sup>85</sup> My research demonstrates that this

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<sup>83</sup> T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>84</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, March 20, 2017.

<sup>85</sup> James Elkins observes that art history has persistently maintained its presence as a "marginal, old-fashioned, ...parochial discipline," noting the "sense of unease that idea continues to generate".

trend in maintaining distance between individual interpreter and object is particularly inappropriate when discussing the artist's book, as the object itself requires viewer participation to engage with its intrinsic tactile and temporal qualities. To interpret Herel's work, it is necessary to individually experience it.

My method of applying experiential analysis and employing a first-person perspective to interpret Herel's work finds both validation and support in the work of several contemporary writers. Siri Hustvedt (1955-) writes of the 'intersubjectivity' inherent in engaging with art: "It [the viewing of visual art] is the silent encounter between the viewer, 'I', and the object, 'it' ".<sup>86</sup> In texts such as *Mysteries of the Rectangle* (2005), Hustvedt interweaves anecdotal material, history, formal analysis and theory together to create informed yet experiential analyses of art objects.<sup>87</sup> This research corroborates Hustvedt's proposition that the use of 'visceral response' as a starting point to analyse an artwork forges new interpretive paths.<sup>88</sup> In *The Sight of Death* Clark shapes interpretation around near-daily diary entries in front of his chosen artwork, maintaining first person narrative throughout.<sup>89</sup> What is more, Clark experiments further with subjective interpretation by writing poetry inspired by the formal qualities of the work and the act of experiencing it.<sup>90</sup> By doing this, Clark demonstrates the value of engaging with expressive material in an equally expressive manner. By experimenting with poetry, Clark creates a new space in which it is appropriate to express personal thoughts and ask open-ended questions that is still firmly rooted in looking at the object and drawing upon art historical knowledge.

Like the writing of Hustvedt and Clark, this dissertation argues that individual interpretation is scholastic; indeed, it exposes that the presumed dichotomy between academic and subjective is false.<sup>91</sup> Using these writers, along with others engaging with the affect of art including Geoffrey Batchen, James Elkins, Briony Fer, and Susan Stewart to

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James Elkins, *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), xiv.

<sup>86</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *Mysteries of the Rectangle* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), xix.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., xx-xxi.

<sup>89</sup> *The Sight of Death* will be discussed at length in Chapters One and Two.

T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> This poetry is not just an exercise but the generation of a new creative form out of individual interpretation.

Ibid., 40.

<sup>91</sup> In *Art as Experience*, John Dewey writes: "It is mere ignorance that leads then to the supposition that connection of art and esthetic perception with experience signifies a lowering of their significance and dignity...Instead of signifying being shut up within one's own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of the self and the world of objects and events". Dewey's early twentieth century interest in individual interpretation and the experience of art can be considered precedence for contemporary experiential writers in art history. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), 19.

contextualise my approach, I make no apologies for my use of the first person when interpreting Herel's artist book practice.<sup>92</sup> This dissertation is not only innovative in its reinstatement of the experiential qualities of the artist's book into analysis, but by doing so it also inserts analysis of the artist's book into the forefront of contemporary developments within the discipline.

Drucker passionately calls for a contemporary response to the artist's book:

Where are the critics? The serious historians? The zones of discourse in which the field can reflect upon its own conceptual values? Ten years after the initial publication [of Drucker's seminal text *The Century of Artists' Books* in 1995]...we are still struggling to get such activity to emerge.<sup>93</sup>

This dissertation marks an innovative response to such a call. By articulating the artist's book as aberrant object, I have moved beyond categorising works to formulate a contemporary approach that not only discusses previously ineffable characteristics of the artists' book including its temporal, experiential and subjective qualities, but also reinstates these qualities back into the act of analysis itself.

### *Chapter Outline*

The principal innovation of this dissertation is to present the artist's book as aberrant object. This sustained investigation of the artist's book draws upon interdisciplinary theories from art history, anthropology, linguistics, economics, socio-cultural studies, and material studies to examine the artist's book's place in art history, its collection and display, and individual analysis. I contend that the artist's book, which defies institutional classification and sits outside of the canonical narrative of the history of art, provides a vital case study to question the inherent media bias towards traditional forms of painting and sculpture in collection, display, and discourse of contemporary art in our national cultural institutions and scholarship. The value of a critical engagement with aberrance is demonstrated by numerous case studies examining Herel's books interwoven throughout the research. Combined, this dissertation presents a nonlinear narrative. Part One, comprising two chapters, sets a foundational understanding of the artist's book as aberrant

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<sup>92</sup> Geoffrey Batchen, "Ere the Substance Fade: Photography and Hair Jewellery," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London: Routledge, 2004), 32–46. James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Briony Fer, *Eva Hesse: Studionwork* (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery, 2009).

Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Hvid Kromann, "Booktrekking through the Golden Age of Artists' Books—and Beyond. On the Occasion of the Publication of Anne Mœglin-Delcroix's *Esthétique Du Livre D'Artiste* and Clive Phillpot's *Booktrek*," *Journal of Artists' Books* 35 (2014): 15.

object, before articulating a new experiential methodology necessary to engage with such works. Part Two, comprising three chapters, uses this identification of aberrant object to expose new themes and unstudied concepts in Herel's work. This non-linearity intentionally reflects the interpretive process of circling around such material, and mirrors the way I think about the artist's book as a challenging, subjective object. With no concrete definition, and no prescribed start or endpoint, this dissertation identifies and engages with a necessarily nebulous interpretation of the artist's book.

Formal analysis and discussion throughout this research will be informed by the poetic moment inherent in encountering the artist's book, supporting my argument that the artist's book is an experiential, phenomenological object. This dissertation will consequently include experimental approaches to the artist's book that draw from raw, in situ analysis that resembles automatic response and contains open-ended questions. The questions included in this primary material do not indicate a lack of research or of understanding, but instead highlight the open-ended nature of the artist's book, and the individual and subjective interpretation it encourages. The use of first person throughout my writing is informed by, and mirrors, the artist's book's intimacy. I demonstrate that a subjective perspective is necessary to understanding Herel's work. This dissertation also contains new anecdotal material and quotes from interviews with the artist I have conducted over the last three years. Such research is essential to understanding Herel's artist book practice, and this new primary material supports the validity of my approach.

### *Part One: Methodology*

Part One of this dissertation cements the concept of artist's book as aberrant object and develops a methodology for interpreting the artist's book. This discussion is prefaced by a chronological outline of Herel's life and practice. This biographical timeline necessarily contextualises Herel's work, establishing his nature as a polyglot, as well as how and when he was exposed to particular sources of inspiration and influence. The timeline tracks Herel's international movements, demonstrating his place as an artist who sits between multiple cultures and languages. It also notes the acquisition of Herel's work in specific collections discussed in the first chapter. This chronology provides detailed attention to periods in Herel's life that provide valuable background for the arguments of this research.

Chapter One establishes the artist's book as aberrant object. The identification of aberrant characteristics of Herel's books leads to a comprehensive examination of the artist's play with the traditional book codex and the concept of the book as simultaneously open and closed object. The artist's book will be demonstrated to challenge the human tendency to

understand through categorisation, inspiring an institutional critique of the artist's book as part of library, gallery, and personal collections with specific focus on the importance of touch and the perception of intimacy. It will be argued that the artist's book interrogates ideas of value, and considering it through the innovative paradigm of aberrance forces reinterpretation and understanding, influencing the ways in which such work is processed, possessed and interpreted.

This chapter supports the articulation of the artist's book as aberrant object by demonstrating that the features that make such work challenging are in fact a fruitful site for new analysis. This chapter establishes the use of the term aberrant to argue that the artist's book is a medium that encourages new methods of interpretation, and a re-thinking of conventional approaches to object-based display and interaction. It will draw from the philosophical and socio-cultural theories of those including Arjun Appadurai (1949-), Albert Mehrabian (1939-) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), the latter Herel specifically identifies as a source of inspiration yet whose writing has never before been examined in relation to the artist's practice.<sup>94</sup> Applying aberrance to the artist's book re-ascribes agency to an object that can otherwise be avoided due to a perceived esotericism, which I believe is not an intrinsic quality of the book as art object but the result of a lack of understanding. The artist's book as aberrant object reinstates the artist's book as autonomous object, facilitating the application of a new combination of methodologies to analysis and the examination of previously unstudied themes within Herel's oeuvre. The articulation of the artist's book as aberrant object has larger consequences for the study of other objects that do not fit neatly into formal analysis and cultural institutions, demonstrating that contemporary experimentation can be undertaken to generate new scholarship generated by temporal and experiential analysis.

A significant contributing factor to the artist's book as aberrant object is its experiential nature. Chapter Two both argues the necessity of an appropriately experiential interpretation of Herel's work, and demonstrates the application of such interpretation to analysis. This approach embraces the artist's book's affective qualities, innovatively combining temporal and sensory methodologies to analyse Herel's books. Drawing upon methodologies pioneered by Clark and Roberts, I conduct phenomenological experiments to analyse the artist's book, including slow looking, repeated viewing, and touch, subsequently analysing the field notes taken during these studies to demonstrate their contribution to a new understanding of such works.<sup>95</sup> I apply ideas from Performance

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<sup>94</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, August 2015.

<sup>95</sup> T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Theory to inform the artist's book as experiential object, and examine the viewer's role in activating the book.

The temporal and sensory approach applied throughout this chapter has not before been applied to the analysis of Herel's work, and has larger implications for the future study of other works within the genre, as well as other aberrant art objects. This chapter exposes and answers the artist's book's demand for phenomenological analysis that is scholastic, subjective, and experiential. It demonstrates the necessary reassessment of the book as experiential art object, and by doing so critically engages with the temporal qualities of the artist's book that contribute to its aberrance.

### *Part Two: Interpretation*

Part Two of this dissertation demonstrates the wide range of interpretive pathways made possible when embracing the aberrance of the artist's book. It explicitly articulates the type of language that can be used to engage with and discuss such objects. It argues that interpretation can be informed by concepts from other movements and periods interested in re-contextualising the object, such as Surrealism. Focussing upon aberrance also presents an important opportunity to develop new avenues of art historical analysis, including the formal analysis of unreadable text. As this section will demonstrate, such an approach furthermore exposes new themes previously unstudied in Herel's work, giving way to an articulate discussion of what may previously have been considered ineffable.

Due to its embrace of the aberrant object, Chapter Three argues that applying concepts from Surrealism is another way to critically engage with the artist's book as aberrant object. Herel himself identifies Surrealism as having a significant effect upon his work, which though unsurprising considering the artist's Czech background and time spent in France, has not before been analysed through a Surrealist lens. This chapter demonstrates that applying concepts from artists and theorists including André Breton (1896-1966), Louis Aragon (1897-1982), Salvador Dalí (1904-1989), and Paul Nougé (1895-1967) is necessary to understanding Herel's artist book practice.

Inspired by the surreal preoccupation with the subconscious, Herel's work will be newly examined in relation to Outsider Art, specifically that exhibited at *La Halle Saint Pierre* in Paris. Herel identifies the gallery as a significant site during his time spent in Paris, and yet

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Jennifer Roberts, "The Power of Patience," *Harvard Magazine*, December 2013, <http://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience>.



the collection has not before been discussed in tangent with the artist's practice.<sup>96</sup> Surrealism's active subversion of habitual interpretation provides a foundation from which to interrogate the aberrant artist's book in a plethora of new ways. This chapter will analyse Herel's work in relation to concepts of the exquisite corpse, erotic, and outsider. Both individually and combined, these concepts form a new framework that embraces aberrance and provides a new means to comprehensively engage with the artist's book's complexity.

Chapter Four argues that while the self-created, nonsensical text Herel uses throughout his books is aberrant due to its denial of clear meaning, this provides a valuable platform from which to develop a new analysis of the visual qualities of text. This approach will be shaped using the methodological framework of semiology. While the use of semiology, with roots in positive knowledge and semantic meaning, may seem an unexpected approach, I contend that key concepts from semiotic theory can be made malleable and benefit a new aesthetic analysis of text within the artist's book. These key concepts include positivism, the relationship between text and context, and the polysemy of meaning, and will demonstrably contribute to a new critical engagement with the use of text in Herel's work.

This chapter exposes a previous preoccupation with 'cracking the code' when presented with unknown alphabets, and instead suggests the interpretation of familiar, unfamiliar, and unknowable text that is visually, rather than semantically, focussed. It develops a new way to approach Herel's aberrant use of text informed by Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and contemporary graphologist Colette Sirat (1934-).<sup>97</sup> Importantly, it also makes analogies between Herel's textforms and those within Max Ernst's (1891-1976) book *Maximiliana or the Illegal Practice of Astronomy* (1964), which again has been identified by Herel as a significant source of inspiration yet neglected in previous literature.<sup>98</sup> A visual examination of the textual presence in Herel's books reiterates the artist's book as complex, aberrant object—text can convey meaning without being conventionally read, and examining this meaning is necessary to understanding the artist's work.

Chapter Five contends that a significant, and previously overlooked, theme of Herel's artist book practice is cartography. It argues that whether explicitly or conceptually, Herel's books contain maps, and in some cases are maps in and of themselves. This chapter examines the artist's book in relation to cartographic theory and history, asserting that the

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<sup>96</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2016.

<sup>97</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms* (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1985).  
Colette Sirat, *Writing as Handwork: A History of Handwriting in Mediterranean and Western Culture*, ed. L. Schramm (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).

<sup>98</sup> Max Ernst, *Maximiliana: The Illegal Practice of Astronomy: Hommage à Dorothea Tanning* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1974).

Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

artist's book is further aberrant for the liminal place it occupies as a tactile map resting between three-dimensional Earth and two-dimensional mapping paper. It then demonstrates that a new focus upon the cartographic qualities of Herel's work allows for the innovative application of psychogeographical concepts to the analysis of the artist's work. Examining the artist's book using ideas of the labyrinth and the *flâneur* proposes a new way to engage the complexity of the artist's book's physical terrain and conceptual space. This argument will be informed by the writing of Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), whose preoccupation with the labyrinth, reality and belonging continue to be an important personal source of inspiration for Herel.<sup>99</sup>

The idea of a geography of the artist's book inspires an interrogation of 'otherness' within Herel's practice, expanding to discuss the significance of nostalgia, memory, belonging and way finding in the artist's work. What little literature there is on Herel's work has previously neglected these themes, which can only be exposed by embracing the aberrance of the artist's book and engaging with its experiential qualities. While conventional analysis might focus on the explicit, tangible qualities of Herel's books, this chapter examines the presence of nowhere and oblivion within the artist's work through the use of ambiguous subject matter and iconography. Relating to feelings of aberrance, these references evoke spaces that are unclear, uncomfortable, and unknown. To analyse the ambiguous is necessary to understanding Herel's work, and demonstrates the subjective intimacy of interacting with such material. Herel's artist book practice challenges and expands the very definition of the map and cartography. Examining his work, map is noun and verb, physical and conceptual, found place and way finding, here and nowhere.

All five of these chapters engage with the artist's book as aberrant object by presenting new perspectives and interpretive methods that embrace the liminal, temporal, experiential, and intimate qualities that challenge conventional approach. By first articulating the artist's book as aberrant object in Chapter One, this dissertation identifies past preoccupations with categorisation and concrete understanding that have taken precedence over tangible analysis. By establishing the restrictive nature of this approach, this research actively works to move past this previous confusion to instead embrace the challenging qualities of the artist's book, using them to generate new understanding. Chapter Two takes the intimate, experiential and temporal qualities of Herel's work to examine new ways in which art history can interpret art objects in an informed, subjective manner. Chapter Three uses a surreal paradigm to establish a new approach to the artist's book that embraces poeticism, the relationship between image and text, and the evocative presence of the exquisite corpse

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<sup>99</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, 20 March, 2017.

and eroticised form. Chapter Four identifies the artist's book's challenge of conventional promises of the book to communicate clear, semantic meaning. After identifying this aberrant point of difference, it moves on to suggest a new manner of critically engaging with text that is visually informed. Finally, Chapter Five simultaneously engages with qualities of temporality and materiality inherent in Herel's work to suggest a new way of moving around and within the space of the artist's book informed by ideas of belonging and existence. Combined, the chapters of this dissertation assert the value of identifying the artist's book as aberrant object, then use this articulation of aberrance to generate new interpretive pathways. From aberrance grows new understanding.

Not only does this dissertation mark a new examination of Herel's work and the artist's book more broadly, it also has the significant possibility to be used as a case study to challenge the way art history thinks about other objects that do not fit easily into the canonical narrative. This research interrogates the place of the experiential, tactile, and subjective art object within art history and cultural institutions. It critiques current practices of collection, display, and analysis, before demonstrating that by identifying an object as aberrant art history can undertake interpretation that results in affective analysis. Such analysis is necessary when dealing with objects that intrinsically engage with the phenomenological. Using a paradigm of aberrance demonstrably opens current scholarship to contemporary experimentation, forging a new pathway for development within the discipline of Art History. This dissertation exposes, examines, and demonstrates the analytical possibility of the aberrant object. To be aberrant is not to be abhorrent.

At some stage, this sitting with *Carnet d'un Malade* must come to an end. I consider the term 'sitting', finding it unsuitably static to describe my encounter with the artist's book. The tactility of *Carnet d'un Malade* has led me to become particularly conscious of my physical interaction with the book: the gestures of reading and viewing. Rather than closing the book after the final page, I am conscious that Herel does not intend for the viewer to necessarily interact with his work in a chronological fashion.<sup>100</sup> I close instead in the middle of the codex, on a page that mostly features text (Fig. 1d). I note that the horizontal lines on the page, to which I previously attributed a notebook quality, do not guide the text. Instead, though also running horizontally, the words rest above and below these lines, and some even sit with line piercing straight through them. These unsteady lines, and this misaligned handwriting, do not evoke the neat perfection one might like to exercise in a book destined for the hands of a reader or viewer. Again, Herel challenges my habitual expectations of how a book should behave, what its purpose is. At the bottom of this

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<sup>100</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

block of text Herel has smudged the writing, leaving a trace of its original state visible through sweeping blue wash. The artist presents me with a book that evokes gesture, movement, and the unknowable, rather than the concise and clear. Not conforming to what I have come to understand as the conventional book, and breaking preconceived promises that the book will clearly communicate semantic meaning, Herel instead presents a complex, uncertain, and intimate work that demands a new analytical approach to the book as art object. Book in hand, I begin.

## **Petr Herel: a biographical chronology**

**1943**

Born in Hořice, Czechoslovakia

Hořice was a town known for its focus on art making, home of a major sculpture school. Though Herel moved away at five years old, he was exposed to artistic practice from an early age.<sup>101</sup>

**1957-1961**

Attended Prague Art School

The Prague Art School's curriculum encouraged students to learn across disciplines and techniques, and also featured the study of literature, European languages (Czech, Russian, German) and art history. Herel's most influential figures at the School were the graphic arts and printmaking teacher, Viktorin, and teacher of life drawing Nina Papouskova.<sup>102</sup> This interest in printmaking and drawing marked the beginning of Herel's lifelong focus in these areas.

**1961-1964**

Worked as graphic artist at Museum of Prague and the City of Prague Gallery

**1964-1969**

Attended the Prague Academy of Applied Arts, studying in the book creation studio under Karel Svolinský (1896-1986)

Herel completed his six-year course in five years due to his technical skills and well informed ideas.<sup>103</sup> Under Svolinský, a recognised 'book artist', Herel developed a comprehensive range of skills related to the graphic arts, including typography, book design and layout, and printmaking.<sup>104</sup> Reflecting his ongoing focus on the metaphysical and interrogation of religion and existence, for his final project Herel chose to create a book using text from the Passion of Christ according to the Gospel of St. Matthew.<sup>105</sup>

This period marked a time in which Herel studied texts that would both influence and feature in future work. He read much European avant-garde and symbolist literature.<sup>106</sup> Early sources of inspiration were found in the texts of writers including Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), Novalis (1772-1801), Comte de Lautréamont (1846-1870), and Josef Hora

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<sup>101</sup> Sasha Grishin, "Catalogue Essay," in *Petr Herel: Písmo Duše: A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 42.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 46.

(1891-1945).<sup>107</sup> This exposure to symbolist, avant-garde, and early Surrealist literature influenced his contemporaneous and future practice. Simultaneously, Herel furthered his studies of the Czech Baroque, Bohemian Gothic, Surrealism, and Romanticism, establishing the oft-dark and complex qualities of his work.<sup>108</sup>

**1968** Awarded Arnošt Šáňka Prize for Czechoslovakian Artist Book of the Year, for *Fragmenty* (Fragments), with text by Novalis

Visited France for the first time.

**1970** Awarded French Ministry of Culture Scholarship to study at *Atelier Nourrison*

France has remained a significant site for Herel's practice, both through the inspiration the artist gleaned from the city as well as the bibliophilic community that supported, exhibited and collected his work.

Met future wife Dorothy Catherine Davis (1939-2016), textile artist and designer, who was working at the time on designs for tapestry weavers in Paris.<sup>109</sup>

**1971** First solo exhibition at *Galerie Le Pont*

Reflecting the French community's particular interest in the artist's book, Herel's first exhibition was in Paris.<sup>110</sup>

First acquired by the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*

Herel notes that the *Bibliothèque* had a policy to "buy work from every young artist, and I had my grant 1970-71".<sup>111</sup>

**1972** Married Australian designer Dorothy Catherine Herel (née Davis)

**1972** Awarded Czechoslovakian State Grant

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<sup>107</sup> Sasha Grishin, "Catalogue Essay," in *Petr Herel: Písmo Duše: A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 13.

Petr Herel and Jan M Tomeš, *Petr Herel: Knihy* (Labyrinth Press), *Kresby, Grafika, 20 Zari-20 Rijna 1990* (Prague: Musée de la littérature tchèque, 1990).

<sup>108</sup> Grishin, op cit., 14.

<sup>109</sup> Elizabeth Cross, "Obituary: Designer Dorothy Herel Made Exquisite Work for Dance and Display," The Canberra Times, October 18, 2016, <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/canberra-life/obituary-designer-dorothy-herel-made-exquisite-work-for-dance-and-display-20161012-gs0ono.html>.

<sup>110</sup> Roger Butler, *With the Imprint of Another Culture* (Melbourne: Print Council of Australia, 1988), 12. "Petr Herel" (Australian Galleries, 2016),

[https://australiangalleries.com.au/app/uploads/2016/01/HEREEL\\_CV16.pdf](https://australiangalleries.com.au/app/uploads/2016/01/HEREEL_CV16.pdf).

<sup>111</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, November 5, 2017.

1973

Emigrated to Rome, before moving to Melbourne, Australia

Solo exhibition at Galeria Il Segno, Rome

First exhibition in Australia at Crossley Gallery, Melbourne

Herel experienced a successful solo exhibition in Rome at Galeria Il Segno, further reflecting the European sensibility of his work. He and Dorothy then relocated to Melbourne, where the artist's first Australian exhibition was shown at Crossley Gallery. The show featured etchings of surreal figures and landscapes.<sup>112</sup> In the same year, Crossley Gallery also exhibited works by George Baldessin (1939-1978) and Bruno Leti (1943-), establishing an interest in the work of European-born artists residing in Australia.<sup>113</sup> Established in 1966 by artist and printmaker Tate Adams (1922-), the Gallery was dedicated to specifically exhibiting prints by contemporary Australian artists, along with some international material from Japan.<sup>114</sup> Particularly relevant to Herel's practice, Adams was interested in artist's books, and specifically the French *livre d'artiste*, forming Lyre Bird Press with Baldessin in 1977.<sup>115</sup> By choosing to live in Melbourne, Herel was placing himself in a city with contemporaries who understood his European sensibility and passion for the book as art object.

It is unsurprising that many Australian printmakers at this time were European born. In the 1940s and 1950s, the country welcomed a notable influx of migrant printmakers, including Udo Sellbach (1927-2006), Henry Salkauskas (1925-1979), Baldessin and Leti, amongst many others, whose influence spread through their establishment of print workshops and work as teachers.<sup>116</sup> Their dedicated focus on intaglio techniques in particular led to a marked popularity in printmaking in the 1960s, which saw the establishment of many print-dedicated galleries and exhibitive spaces such as Crossley Gallery, as well as the Print Council of Australia, formed in 1966.<sup>117</sup>

1974

Solo exhibition at Europa Gallery, Melbourne

Solo exhibition at Langsam Gallery, Melbourne

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<sup>112</sup> Alan McCulloch and Susan McCulloch, eds., "Herel, Petr," *The Encyclopedia of Australian Art* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 337.

<sup>113</sup> Jenny Zimmer, *Tate Adams and the Crossley Gallery, 1966-1980* (South Yarra: Macmillan Education Australia, 2002), 108.

<sup>114</sup> Hendrik Kolenberg and Anne Ryan, "Tate Adams: Australian Prints from the Gallery's Collection," 1998, <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/DA41.1963/>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Sasha Grishin, *Australian Art: A History* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2013), 414.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 416.

- 1975** Appointed lecturer in drawing and printmaking at Caulfield Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Australia
- Solo exhibition at Realities Gallery, Melbourne
- Solo exhibition at Gallery Huntly, Canberra

Though being appointed a significant position at the Caulfield Institute, Herel felt isolated, and with his family decided to move back to France, reiterating the country's important presence in Herel's life.<sup>118</sup>

- 1976** Awarded Georges Prize for Drawing, Melbourne
- Solo exhibition at Macquarie Galleries, Sydney
- Solo exhibition at Gallery Huntly, Canberra
- Work first acquired by the Australian National Gallery (now the National Gallery of Australia)<sup>119</sup>

- 1977** Lectured in Printmaking at *l'École Nationale des Beaux-Arts*, Dijon

Herel's time in Dijon was extremely influential on his future practice. It was here the artist met future collaborator and close friend, the printer and typographer Thierry Bouchard (1954-2008). Bouchard and Herel shared a sustained focus on classical typography and an interest in the relationship between image and text, which saw the pair form Labyrinth Press in 1980.<sup>120</sup>

- 1978** Moved back to Australia
- Solo exhibition at Gallery Huntly, Canberra

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<sup>118</sup> Sasha Grishin, "Catalogue Essay," in *Petr Herel: Písmo Duše: A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 49.

<sup>119</sup> This acquisition was a group of five individual prints and drawings: *not titled [death and a woman]* (1973); *not titled [erotic drawing]* (1973); *Compenetration* (1974); *Dictateur de Metamorphoses* (1975); *not titled [figure shrouded in sheets between poles]* (1975).

National Gallery of Australia, "Not Titled [Death and a Woman]," Catalogue Record, 2017, <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=39433>

National Gallery of Australia, "Not Titled [Erotic Drawing]," Catalogue Record, 2017, <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=39434>

National Gallery of Australia, "Compenetration," Catalogue Record, 2017, <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=39431>

National Gallery of Australia, "Dictateur de Metamorphoses," Catalogue Record, 2017, <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=39432>

National Gallery of Australia, "Not Titled [Figure Shrouded in Sheets between Poles]," Catalogue Record, 2017, <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/detail.cfm?irn=39435>.

<sup>120</sup> Anne Gray, *Petr Herel: An Exhibition of Artists Books at the National Library of Australia 22 March-30 June 1989* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1989), 60.



In 1978, Herel suffered a severe breakdown and moved to Canberra.

**1979-1998**                      Head of Graphic Investigation Workshop, Canberra School of Art

Herel was founding head of the Graphic Investigation Workshop at the Canberra School of Art, under the directorship of Udo Sellbach, from 1979 to 1998.<sup>121</sup> The Workshop was created in response to a developing attitude towards drawing as an autonomous activity, celebrating the technique's ambiguity.<sup>122</sup> From this, students experimented with response to literary inspiration, and developed an "outstanding record for the production of artists' books", leading the Workshop to become an internationally recognised endeavour.<sup>123</sup> Herel actively encouraged students to extend drawing beyond conventional illustration, using it to instead engage with larger metaphysical issues of being.<sup>124</sup>

Herel's ethos and approach to teaching was arguably well suited to the Canberra School of Art in particular as the community included many European migrants. Sellbach was born in Germany before migrating to Australia in 1955.<sup>125</sup> From 1978-97, German-born Jörg Schmeisser was head of Printmaking.<sup>126</sup> In the late 1970s Gillian Mann, born in the United Kingdom, taught in the same workshop.<sup>127</sup> This heavily European-influenced community was an appropriate space in which Herel could teach students of the book as art object through a European lens, strengthened by arrangements made for Bouchard to visit the School to undertake residencies in 1988 and 1989.<sup>128</sup> In 1988, Bouchard worked on two poems by Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) and Dylan Thomas (1914-1953), with respective English and French translations.<sup>129</sup> Herel comments that these projects were organised well in advance and in meticulous detail—Bouchard would set the French letters in France before coming to Australia, and once at the Canberra School of Art students would set the English with their own imagery in whatever book format and composition they chose.<sup>130</sup> In a 2017 letter, Herel notes: "I am talking about this particular collaboration because it was quite demanding to prepare it and organise everything, but... [it was a] particularly

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<sup>121</sup> Sasha Grishin, "Catalogue Essay," in *Petr Herel: Pismo Duše: A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 50.

<sup>122</sup> Pat Gilmour, "Introduction," in *Graphic Investigation Workshop 1978-1988* (Canberra: CITA, 1988), 7.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

Grishin, op cit., 50.

<sup>124</sup> Gilmour, op cit., 7.

<sup>125</sup> "Udo Sellbach," National Gallery of Victoria, 2017, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/artist/4582/>.

<sup>126</sup> "Jörg Schmeisser," Beaver Galleries, 2017, <http://www.beavergalleries.com.au/schmeisser.htm>.

<sup>127</sup> "Personal History," Gillian Mann 1939-2007, 2017, <http://gillian.artistmann.com/home/bio/personal-history>.

<sup>128</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, November 5, 2017.

<sup>129</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, November 6, 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.



- Solo exhibition at Rudy Komon Gallery, Sydney
- 1984** Solo exhibition at Powel Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 1985-1986** Visiting lecturer at the Institute of Visual Arts, Orléans
- Further cementing his European, and particularly French, sensibility, Herel spent his time as visiting lecturer working on his own books and “investigating French teaching methods” – a conscious continuation of his ties to Europe.<sup>137</sup>
- 1986** Solo exhibition at *Cite Internationale des Arts*, Paris
- 1988** Exhibited in ‘Retrospective of artist books’, *Bibliothèque de Beaune*, Beaune
- 1989** Exhibited in ‘Retrospective of artist books’, National Library of Australia, Canberra
- Solo exhibition at Giles Street Gallery, Canberra
- Solo exhibition at Centre for the Arts, Tasmanian University, Hobart
- Solo exhibition at the Arts Centre, Australian National University, Canberra
- 1990** Exhibited in ‘Retrospective’, National Museum of Czech Literature, Prague
- 1992** Awarded Honourable Medal, *Lviv Interprint*, Ukraine
- Awarded Visiting Fellowship, Monash University, Melbourne
- 1995** Awarded Amcor Invitation Paper Award, Melbourne
- Solo exhibition at *Le Locle Art Museum*, Neuchâtel
- 1999** Artist in Residence, Christchurch Polytechnic, New Zealand
- Awarded Canberra Critics Circle Award, Canberra
- Solo exhibition at Smyrnios Gallery, Melbourne

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<sup>137</sup> Anne Gray, *Petr Herel: An Exhibition of Artists Books at the National Library of Australia 22 March-30 June 1989* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1989), 7.

	Solo exhibition <i>Písmo Duše</i> at Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra
<b>2000</b>	Artist in Residence, <i>Schloss Handenstein</i> , Chur, Switzerland
	Solo exhibition at <i>Gallery Hollar</i> , Prague
<b>2001</b>	Awarded Edith Cowan University Bunbury and Perth Art Residency, Perth
	Solo exhibition at Homes à Court Gallery, Perth
<b>2005</b>	Solo exhibition 'CMAG Cancellation Series' at Canberra Museum and Gallery, Canberra
<b>2007-</b>	Working under the imprint Uncollected Works Press (Appendix 1)
<b>2009</b>	Awarded the Jean Lurçat Prize for Bibliophile Book, Academy of Fine Arts, Institute de France, Paris
	Solo exhibition at <i>Librairie Nicaise</i> , Paris
<b>2010</b>	Solo exhibition at Australian Galleries, Melbourne
<b>2014-2015</b>	Awarded Creative Fellowship, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
<b>2015</b>	Solo exhibition at Australian Galleries, Melbourne

During his time spent at the State Library of Victoria, Herel studied the notebooks of French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry (1871-1945). This undertaking was significant as it allowed the artist to further develop his sustained interest in Valéry – to build upon the long relationship Herel has had with the writer's words using particularly intimate material. Herel references Valéry's notebooks, and particularly his thoughts on posterity, in interview.<sup>138</sup>

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Petr Herel has been exhibiting in solo and group exhibitions since 1971, and has work in numerous public and private collections across Australia and the globe (Appendix 2). This chronology demonstrates Herel's polyglot nature and his movement between different roles, spaces and places. It identifies seminal relationships that have influenced his artist book practice. Noting the significant biographical events listed above importantly

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<sup>138</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

contextualises Herel's work, and this research answers the demand that his demonstrably sustained practice requires.

## **Part One**

### **Methodology**

## Chapter One

### Artist's Book: Aberrant Object

It is easy to be caught up in the 'whatness' of a thing. In doing so, in becoming focussed on 'whatness', one tends to overlook the 'howness' and the 'whyness'. A lack of clear, concrete definition becomes a roadblock, preventing the exploration of what makes an object so immediately complex. The artist's book is visually, conceptually, and physically challenging. As such, I argue the case of the artist's book as aberrant object. The fundamental factors contributing to this aberrance will be identified and discussed throughout this chapter. Petr Herel's artists' books will be used as a case study to reveal and examine these characteristics of aberrance, which include play with the traditional book codex and the book as both physically and symbolically an open and closed object.<sup>139</sup> Such discussion lends itself to an examination of the collection and display of the artist's book, ideas of value, and finally a link to the act of revelatory seeing—all of which make evident the artist's book's presence as visually, conceptually, and physically aberrant. Considering the artist's book through the innovative paradigm of aberrance forces reinterpretation and understanding, influencing the way in which the book is processed, possessed and interpreted.

My use of the term aberrant throughout this chapter, and indeed the rest of this dissertation, is positive. I propose that when analysing the artist's book, the term is not pejorative but heroic, marking new interpretive possibilities and a specific complexity. Applying aberrance to the artist's book re-ascribes agency to an object that is otherwise avoided due to a perceived esotericism, and a lack of exposure through public access and display. Here, the term aberrance shakes the viewer out of their own complacency, and offers an institutional critique of the genre applicable to other objects that do not fit neatly into conventional collection and exhibitive practices. Throughout this chapter, I propose a paradigm of aberrance that not only reinvigorates the analysis of Herel's artist book practice, but also has larger consequences for studies of the object.

#### *The (Un)Familiar Codex*

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<sup>139</sup> The term 'codex' is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "an ancient manuscript in book form". Throughout this thesis, I will use this historical term to describe what has now become the conventional form of a book: ordered pages, bound or unbound, contained within some type of cover. "Codex," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/codex>.

The aberrant object, with roots in Surrealism and Dada, can be described as one “created through displacement”.<sup>140</sup> It is an object that has been taken out of its original context; an object the artist has played with to create a new entity, however superficially recognisable. It is this seemingly familiar format that is at the heart of Herel’s artists’ books as aberrant objects. While the concept is not unique to the artist’s book, it has not before been applied to works of this kind.

Coming to a concrete definition of the artist’s book is largely impossible. The genre includes works that transform the book format in a variety of manners, stretching the limits of what one might refer to as a book.<sup>141</sup> However, it also includes books that express a historical sensibility toward the traditional book codex. Herel’s books are an example of the latter, yet they still create a deep sense of otherness. Resistant to seeing this object as a work of art rather than one of the everyday, the viewer is uncomfortable with the presentation of the ‘other’ in such a recognisable form. The artist’s book is an object that ‘casts doubt’.<sup>142</sup> Significantly, Herel is creating a sense of irony. The artist references the book’s quintessential historical form as a handmade, crafted object. Compared to contemporary mass-produced books, the binding of Herel’s pages is made by hand, and demands attention. Tactility, the texture of the paper, becomes an emphasised feature rather than an overlooked detail. One notices the spine, the cover, and the placement of text on the page. Australian concrete poet and writer Alex Selenitsch, himself a contributor to previous literature on Herel, comments:

If there is anything at odds with the narrative [of the artist’s book] it is the STANDARD MODERN BOOK. Like grids on a map and their absence from the ground, and more so the sea, the standard book’s substance is unrelated to the matter it presents. No wonder we spend years learning to read, learning to

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<sup>140</sup> The Heide Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition *The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada, and Surrealism* used the term aberrant to describe objects created by women across Dada and Surrealism—periods that consciously challenged artistic conventions.

Heide Museum of Modern Art, *The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada and Surrealism* (Bulleen: Museum of Modern Art at Heide), 23.

Other periods, movements and specific moments in the history of art have toyed with the aberrant or a sense of ‘otherness’ in their own manner. For example, Installation Art can often seem ineffable, and consequently aberrant. And in the Mail Art first championed by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), concept was more important than concrete form—individuals sent objects, writing and ideas through the post, challenging previous ideas of the art object.

For an introduction to Installation and Mail Art, see: Adam Geczy and Benjamin Genocchio, eds., *What Is Installation?* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001).

Stefanie Schwabe, “20 International Contact with Mail Art in the Spirit of Peaceful Coexistence: Birger Jesch’s Mail Art Project (1980–81),” in *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945-1989)* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 255–63.

<sup>141</sup> Take, for example, the sculpturally-informed books of Christopher Croft (*Sketch-of-book*, 1983), Robin White (*Walking to Tebnatarawa*, 1991) and Ian Burn (with Mel Ramsden, *Index (model (...))*, 1970).

<sup>142</sup> Jérôme Dupeyrat, “Publishing Art,” *Journal of Artists’ Books* 37 (2015): 32.



ignore the paper and print, the covers and spine. At the same time, these...books [artists' books] have kept their links with the beginnings of book culture.<sup>143</sup>

This sense of craftsmanship was not always the 'other', and was not historically used to create a sense of aberrance. However, today, overlooking such features has become the norm. To be ignorant of the beauty in the details has become the standard.

Herel's work is in limbo, hovering in a space created by the artist between what we know and what we do not. Herel's books suggest a familiar codex—the paper and print, the covers and spine—yet present this format in a new manner. Both the creation and study of the artist's book demands a re-acknowledgement of previously overlooked details, and for the viewer to learn the skills to appreciate such nuances. Herel's work has kept its link with traditional book culture, but encourages a sense of self-awareness when turning delicately printed pages, the viewer forced to appreciate layout and formatting as images and text are displayed in an unfamiliar manner. It is this self-awareness when encountering one of Herel's books that is at the core of the aberrance of the artist's work.

The artist's book's uncomfortable sense of otherness is partly a result of the human tendency to understand through organisation and labelling. Studying this phenomenon is interdisciplinary, and innovatively applies a combined anthropological and sociological lens to the study of Herel's work. Studying the recovery from blindness and the influence of one's senses upon identifying objects, seventeenth century Irish philosopher William Molyneux (1656-1698) asked questions as to how one knows a thing is a thing, reflecting ancient preoccupations with ontology and epistemology.<sup>144</sup> The role of categorisation in one's understanding of the world is a significant one, and Herel's practice is aberrant in making its interpreters painfully aware of their dependence upon clear labelling to feel in control. Take, for instance, the work *Le Crépuscule du Matin* (1997).<sup>145</sup> This book challenges categorical understanding, as, though presenting itself as a recognisable book, it is atypically small (Fig. 1a). The book, comprising eleven pages, sits comfortably in one hand, and I

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<sup>143</sup> Alex Selenitsch, *Exhibition of Books and Boats: Jay Arthur, Alexander Hamilton, Petr Herel, Paul Uhlmann: the State Library of Victoria 13th of July to the 25th August, 1991* (Canberra: Council of the State Library of Victoria, 1991), 2.

<sup>144</sup> Molyneux specifically questioned if a man born without sight, having felt several objects in his hands, would be able to recognise these objects without touching them if his sight was restored. The problem interrogates what it is to identify an object, what it is to know an object, and the interplay of the human senses in perception.

Michael J. Morgan, *Molyneux's Question: Vision, Touch and the Philosophy of Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 7.

<sup>145</sup> I have found some discrepancies relating to the titles of Herel's work within literature. If a work is included in the National Library of Australia's collection, I use the title listed in their catalogue as the artist has reviewed this information.

must use the very tips of my fingers to turn pages (Fig. 1b-c). I cannot rely on past experience of books to interpret *Le Crépuscule*. Its identifiable book-like features have been skewed ever so slightly by the artist, and thus cannot be entirely matched with my previous understanding of book-ness.<sup>146</sup> It's small scale questions the very idea of the object, of what I imagine when they think of a book. Herel challenges ideas of the traditional codex by consciously making small changes that capture the viewer's attention, making them hyper-aware of the object in their hands.

Physical qualities aside, *Le Crépuscule du Matin* encourages an exploration of aberrance even in its title. Translated into English, the title is 'The 'Twilight of Morning' or 'The Morning Twilight': dawn, aurora. This is a time of change, a time that rests at the pinpoint between night and day, darkness and light. Like Herel's artist book practice, which rests in a liminal space between literature and art, dawn rests between two limes. It marks the end of night and the beginning of day. However, there is another option—choosing to see the *crépuscule* as a unique time in and of itself, in which both light and dark mix. I can apply this paradigm to the interpretation of Herel's work, identifying its unique dichotomy and placing emphasis upon its otherness. *Le Crépuscule du Matin* speaks to the larger interpretation of the aberrant artist's book, both in its literal title and physical qualities.

Contemporary socio-cultural theory relating to the 'biography of things' is an innovative lens through which to view Herel's work as aberrant.<sup>147</sup> Such writing is focussed upon likening the ways in which society constructs individual people to the construction of things by a social and cultural context.<sup>148</sup> Applying this paradigm, Herel's work must be considered as having a 'social identity', and experiencing the 'dramatics' of everyday social interaction.<sup>149</sup> Such 'dramatics' in the life of the artist's book are identifiable, as the object suffers from an uncertain social identity, an identity in limbo. It is not clearly defined, its place in particular collections is ambiguous, and the interpretation of the book as art object does not have its own established vocabulary. Against the need to understand and

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<sup>146</sup> In his text *On Individuality and Social Forms*, sociologist Georg Simmel speaks of the significance of categorisation in one's understanding of the world. He presents the notion of 'categories of human experience', initially discussing the influence of social development in one's understanding of a thing. The labels society collectively applies to particular objects influence an individual's interpretation of them. Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 37.

<sup>147</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 90.

<sup>148</sup> Appadurai expands: "the drama in an ordinary person's biography stems from what happens with the given status. It lies in the conflicts between the egoistic self and the unambiguous demands of given social identities, or in conflicts arising from interaction between actors with defined roles within a clearly structured social system...At the same time, the individual who does not fit the given niches is either singularized into a special identity—which is sacred or dangerous, and often both—or is simply cast out".

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

categorise, the artist's book is deemed esoteric and largely inaccessible. The aberrance of Herel's artists' books must be addressed.

Subjective interpretation is invited by Herel's work, an approach that does not suffer from the belief that past habit is the only way to engage with the book object. Instead, Herel's work argues the value of being undeterred by the aberrance of the artist's book, to embrace possibilities by acknowledging past reliances and proposing a new freedom of thinking.<sup>150</sup> As Jorge Luis Borges posits: "...we make a very common mistake when we think that we're ignorant of something because we are unable to define it".<sup>151</sup> Herel's artist book practice requires an acceptance of its aberrant status through understanding how it comes to be labelled as such. This acceptance enables new interpretive paths, articulated and applied throughout this dissertation.

The acknowledgement of this uncomfortable feeling in other literature justifies the need to engage subjective vocabulary when analysing Herel's aberrant books.<sup>152</sup> A fundamental element in assessing the influence of social environments is that of 'load', or the weight of psychological impact.<sup>153</sup> Different social environments have a different associated load, which influences the behaviour of individuals within them—acts of 'approach' or 'avoidance'.<sup>154</sup> In his seminal text *Public Spaces and Private Spaces: The Psychology of Work, Play, and Living Environments*, Albert Mehrabian pairs together opposing factors that influence load, including 'novel-familiar', 'uncertain-certain', 'surprising-usual', 'crowded-uncrowded', and 'random-patterned'—those on the right suggesting a lower load in comparison to the left.<sup>155</sup> This theory questions how one might evaluate Herel's work, and what a unit designed to measure aberrance might resemble. Rather than presenting a method involving equations, calculations, and a larger scale into which every environment can be easily

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<sup>150</sup> Simmel writes: "Although they [the contents of life] are social, they are at the same time individual, intelligible in terms of the psychic processes in this or that individual". Applying this ethos, the role of individual perception in interpretation should not be denied, rather integrated into contemporary academia. Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 37.

<sup>151</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 17.

As a significant source of inspiration for Herel's practice, Borges' writing features heavily in Chapter Five.

<sup>152</sup> Ellen Spitz describes first seeing a large Magritte print using words such as 'stunned', 'dizzied', and 'uncanny'.<sup>152</sup> Though not specifically identifying the experience as aberrant, Spitz does borrow a term from Freud that obviously correlates: *unheimlich*. Freud used it to describe "the return of the repressed—that queasy sensation, almost like nausea or panic, that arises when some object, person, or place seems strange and alien but at the same time palpably familiar". A clear link can be made between such language and the unnerving experience of Herel's work, as the viewer attempts to navigate a familiar codex with unfamiliar contents. Ellen H. Spitz, *Museums of the Mind: Magritte's Labyrinth and Other Essays in the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>153</sup> Albert Mehrabian identifies load as such in his text *Public Places and Private Spaces: The Psychology of Work, Play, and Living Environments*.

Albert Mehrabian, *Public Spaces and Private Spaces: The Psychology of Work, Play, and Living Environments* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1976), 12.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

sorted, the idea of environmental load presents the experiential as a valid interpretive tool. The assessment of load is individual, dependent on circumstances and context, and so is an informed, subjective analytical approach.

I argue that this concept of the loaded space can be extended by the study of Herel's work to articulate the 'loaded object'. The aforementioned list of identifying adjectives can be applied in rating the experience of the artist's book, with a higher load reflecting a more aberrant status. Herel's books engage with many of the higher load descriptors—uncertain, complex, novel, rare, random and improbable.<sup>156</sup> Therefore, the notion of load presents a new way to describe the interpretation of the aberrant artist's book, as a high load object.<sup>157</sup> The identification of artist's book as 'loaded object' creates a foothold from which to further examine the contributors to its aberrance.

Examining the 1994 book *Letzte Eintragung = Last Entry*, it is possible to analyse the smaller details that contribute to a larger composite sense of aberrance. The cover of this book is a rich black (Fig. 2a). It is without text, without clear descriptor—without the expected. From the beginning it has already started to develop a sense of difference, of loaded otherness. So potent is this sense of otherness that it permeates from the object before I even open it. The first page with text presents the name of writer Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926, Fig. 2b). Again, the text is not an obvious colour, printed in a silvery grey, the light colour making the viewer work to read it. I am not used to being presented with words in books that are intentionally difficult to read, the usually comfortable book rendered uncomfortable.

The first print of *Letzte Eintragung* presents itself several soft, textured pages later (Fig. 2c-d). This print is an entirely orange sheet, with no clear border or plate-mark—if given more space, the image could easily extend off the page. It is visually ambiguous, acting against the expectation of conventional book illustration. There is nothing literal about this image, and its ambiguous form does not clearly work to support the text in a typical manner. The focal point is a slender crucifix that appears to be floating amongst the cloudy masses. There is no evidence of this image linking directly to the text, and it is not presented directly next to any writing. Like the crucifix, the meaning of the print itself is floating indefinitely. Later repetitions of this image throughout the book feature a more prominent crucifix, printed in black ink that emphasises the symbol's scratchy lines, but the visual

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<sup>156</sup> Albert Mehrabian, *Public Spaces and Private Spaces: The Psychology of Work, Play, and Living Environments* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1976), 12.

<sup>157</sup> While Mehrabian applies this rating system to objects, he deems the majority of books as providing "lower load and...[heightened] feelings of dominance".  
Ibid., 243.

does not become more comprehensible (Fig. 2e). Instead, Herel's use of the conventional book codex to present a sense of the ambiguous unknown makes *Letzte Eintragung* a loaded object—an aberrant object.

References to Herel's practice within previous literature, and writing on the artist book genre in general, have not linked the artist's book with the aberrant object. The term has been historically associated with the description of objects created by Surrealist artists in 1920s Paris.<sup>158</sup> Writing on works attributed a canonical status, on the other hand, is abundant. John Dewey writes of 'classic' art as having a wall built around it—in being labelled exemplary, the work is stripped of autonomy and context, and loses meaning.<sup>159</sup> He emphasises the importance of experiencing an object in its entirety, rather than simply celebrating its removed status: "Because experience is the fulfilment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ".<sup>160</sup> A canonical label limits interpretation. The same theory can be applied to those objects identified as aberrant, though the impact upon their interpretation is arguably even greater. At least the public knows the canonical object, it is acknowledged in literature, and, however clichéd has become a part of our cultural fabric. The aberrant object remains on the fringes.

If a scale were to be realised, the canonical object and its aberrant cousin would rest at entirely opposite ends of a spectrum of value. The aberrant object, requiring more work to interpret due to its reflexive play with the very nature of interpretation, is disregarded as intentionally inaccessible, and labelled esoteric. It is put on the opposite of a pedestal; it is shoved into a box and placed in a dark closet. However, similar to its classic cousin, it too has been taken out of context and limited to a particular vocabulary for being considered too difficult. The aberrant object can be exquisite, beautiful, detailed and finished. The aberrant object can be valued. This is evident in the work of Petr Herel.

Other genres within art have been able to successfully distance themselves from connotations of superiority or esotericism when engaging with the book. Collage and photography demonstrate the inclusion of text and the book in visual art that is not immediately assumed inaccessible. Considering the series *Riffs on Real Time* (2006-2009) by Leslie Hewitt, the artist uses both text and books in her layered photographs (Fig. 3). In *Riffs on Real Time (10 of 10)*, the book object is used symbolically rather than as medium, and

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<sup>158</sup> See: Heide Museum of Modern Art, *The Aberrant Object: Women, Dada and Surrealism* (Bulleen, Vic.: Museum of Modern Art at Heide, 1994).

<sup>159</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Blach & Company, 1934), 3.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 19.

creates a sense of nostalgia by referencing a diary.<sup>161</sup> The book is very much the subject of the photograph, creating a sense of distance in being closed. In contrast, Herel's work mixes subject and object together. Ironically, by choosing to maintain a traditional structure, and formatting unrecognisable contents in a recognisable manner, Herel creates a sense of aberrance as it becomes difficult for the viewer to separate engaging with an artwork from the interpretation of conventional books. By playing with the familiar book form and instigating an aberrant interpretive experience, Herel's artists' books certainly 'cast doubt'.<sup>162</sup> As both matter in hand and artwork, Herel's book is both subject and object. Consider *Letzte Eintragung*—as subject, the viewer can consider the work's contents, its prints and text. Yet the book's small scale emphasises the work's material presence, and the viewer can consequently engage with the book as an object before even opening the first page.

I propose that interpreting the artist's book as aberrant object demands an undertaking of de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation.<sup>163</sup> Engaging with Herel's work, the viewer must first de-contextualise the book from their cultural memory, detach themselves from preconceived notions built from past experience. When holding one of Herel's works in their hands, turning its pages and feeling the textured paper, noticing the placement of text and the finesse of the printmaking, the viewer undergoes a process of re-contextualisation by experiencing a new kind of book—the artist's book. The aberrance to be found in this process is not a negative phenomenon. Indeed, when embraced, this aberrance encourages curiosity. After undergoing this process, it becomes evident that objects, however familiar, can have varying functions.<sup>164</sup> These functions can be practical, but also abstract.<sup>165</sup> They acknowledge the presence of familiar and unfamiliar spaces, giving way to the placement of Herel's work as resting between the two.

### *Open / Closed Object*

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<sup>161</sup> Interestingly, and relevant to the argued necessity for a subjective, experiential interpretation of the artist's book, in her essay on the *Riffs on Real Time* series curator Susan Thompson thanks the artist for "...encouraging me to resist deterministic readings of her work". The intrinsic personal significance of the diary requires an appropriately emotive response.

Susan Thompson, "Leslie Hewitt Riffs on Real Time, 2006-09," in *Photo-Poetics: An Anthology* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2015), 68.

<sup>162</sup> Jérôme Dupeyrat, "Publishing Art," *Journal of Artists' Books* 37 (2015): 32.

<sup>163</sup> Stephen H. Riggins, ed., *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 20.

<sup>164</sup> French philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard address this by stating that an object can either be 'utilised' or 'possessed'.

Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 8.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

Herel's artists' books further project aberrance through their presence as simultaneously open and closed objects. Their appearance can change at the turn of a cover, a flick of a page. Susan Stewart writes of the uncomfortable concept of book as never static:

The metaphors of the book are metaphors of containment, of exteriority and interiority, of surface and depth, of covering and exposure, of taking apart and putting together. To be 'between covers'—the titillation of intellectual or sexual reproduction.<sup>166</sup>

Herel's work makes the viewer particularly self-conscious of the never-ending possibilities of interpreting the book; there is an abundance of parts to be seen and combined together, myriad details to be noticed. This self-consciousness creates links between the book as art object, a feeling of sexual titillation, and the exciting feeling of possibility: "The closure of the book is an illusion largely created by its materiality, its cover. Once the book is considered on the plane of its significance, it threatens infinity".<sup>167</sup> The infinite possibilities of the book as art object contribute to feelings of aberrance, as they are limitless and overwhelming. As object and subject, the artist's book creates a space in which multiple interpretive pathways are possible, all dynamically emanating from the one work. The artist's book is not a static object, understood using conventional, objective methodologies. The artist's book is a variable object.

An object that is both open and closed does not suggest an obvious manner to interact with it. An example of this is Herel's book *Zone* (1988), with selected prose by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918). At the National Library of Australia, the book is presented in a hard conservational storage box. To access the book, I must unwrap it. Superficially, the book appears to comply with a traditional codex: a series of pages within a cover. However, when physically engaging with the book, I am immediately confronted by its scale. *Zone* is large, mimicking historical atlases and encyclopaedias. Measuring 39.5 by 26.5 centimetres, to take it out of the protective box and turn through its pages requires exaggerated movements, markedly different to the small, quick gestures usually performed when reading. Engaging with this artist's book demands that I physically inhabit more space to work my way through the movements of reading.

Analysing the first images within *Zone* makes evident the book's atypical nature. Facing a page of French text is a large printed envelope (Fig. 4a-b). This envelope has been decorated with a variety of different objects—a large key with nonsensical cuts, an

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<sup>166</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 37.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

elongated mug, a floating blue triangle. An envelope is conventionally a closed, interior object. It is traditionally an object of containment—letters, paperwork, and photographs. Yet this particular envelope subverts this by presenting information on its exterior. Following this print, several more envelopes are scattered throughout the rest of the book, all with varying images presented on their exteriors. All of these envelopes remain closed, but still informative. Herel is explicitly depicting subject matter that is at once both open and closed, transforming the envelope from a container of revelation to an exhibitor of it—an object presenting accessibility immediacy rather than concealment. This duality within the one work reflects Herel’s larger presentation of book as open and closed object, but in microcosm.

Not only does the envelope-like appearance of the prints in *Zone* suggest openness and closure, the diagonal lines in fact signal Herel’s cancellation of the plate.<sup>168</sup> Consequently, I am presented with compositions that have technically been cancelled; yet still printed in a finished book. Herel writes:

During the work on this project [*The Cancellation Series* 2006, a portfolio marking 30 years of living in Australia for Canberra Museum and Gallery, including prints from *Zone*] I felt as if the plates were given a new life before being sealed off and kept for posterity.<sup>169</sup>

Though some may regard a cancelled plate expired, Herel instead considers this marking of an end a point of new beginnings. While printing these cancelled images, the artist experimented with bright colours, also noting how the diagonals interacted with the composition and final appearance of the prints.<sup>170</sup> As such, approaching the artist’s book as both an open and closed object, and, in the case of *Zone*, an object also containing prints that suggest openness and closure, is valuable in generating a new understanding of Herel’s ethos. Even if an image has been technically closed off, or cancelled, it is not necessarily finished.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

Petr Herel, *The Cancellation Series* (Canberra: Canberra Museum and Gallery, 2006), 5.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Further enhancing this aberrance of printing cancelled plates is Herel’s reasoning for including the physical plate at the back of works such as *Moon-bow* (1981) and *Moon-steamer* (1983): “the idea...was to show (to document...) that after the edition was printed the plates were really cancelled”. In relation to the CMAG *Cancellation Series*, Herel notes that the result of the project was not only 35 portfolios of cancelled plates but also the last print before each plate’s cancellation and the first print post-cancellation. While the term cancellation might technically apply to the action of physically marking the image beyond repair, Herel explores what it means to be truly finished, continuing to print after what should be a finite end, promoting the ongoing existence of the plate by including it in finished work. The artist finishes this explanation by observing: “as you may see, once you enter the world of prints, books, plates, cancellations, etc. - à la Borges



*Collection and Display—Library, Gallery, Personal*

Herel's work is further aberrant when examining its collection and display, as the environment in which one experiences the artist's book significantly impacts how it is socially possessed, processed, and interpreted.<sup>172</sup> This proposition presents the opportunity for a new institutional critique questioning whether Herel's work is better suited to a library or gallery collection. Both the National Library of Australia and the National Gallery of Australia have Herel's books in their collections, and will be used here as comparative examples.<sup>173</sup> Exploring the nuances of institutional collecting raises a discussion of private and public collecting practices, and questions the kind of audience such work is both initially intended for and realistically attracts.

There is an abundance of literature with roots in psychology, sociology, and curatorial studies discussing the influence of environment upon one's interactions with objects and people within it.<sup>174</sup> The ways in which one acts is largely dependent on their context. They are under the influence of various social cues, nuances and unspoken rules: "the personal self is fully infused with the social".<sup>175</sup> From a curatorial point of view, object arrangement in museums and galleries influences communication between different people, as well as between people and the artworks themselves: "the materiality of objects means that they

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- you enter into an infinite labyrinth..." The duality of open and closed is an explicit marker of aberrance in the artist's practice.

Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, November 5, 2017.

<sup>172</sup> Riggins writes of 'the flavour' of a space, indicating that environments evoke different feelings of atmosphere. Even more so, the use of the term 'flavour' mirrors the corporeal focus of Herel's artist book practice.

Stephen H. Riggins, ed., *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 114.

<sup>173</sup> The National Gallery of Australia lists over 50 catalogue records of Herel books, though some of these records split the book into parts. This demonstrates a key issue in the collection and display of the artist's book, as individual institutions catalogue the object differently.

National Gallery of Australia, "Petr Herel," Catalogue Search, (2017), <https://artsearch.nga.gov.au/search.cfm>.

As of August 2017, the National Library of Australia lists over 50 of Herel's individual works in their catalogue, including a near-comprehensive collection of the artist's output through Labyrinth Press.

National Library of Australia, "Petr Herel," Catalogue Search, (2017),

<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Search/Home?lookfor=petr+herel&type=author&limit%5B%5D=&submit=Find&page=1>.

<sup>174</sup> For a foundational overview of said literature, see:

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992). Riggins, op cit., 114.

<sup>175</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, op cit., 190.

occupy their own space”.<sup>176</sup> The assumption cannot be made that objects engage with viewers autonomously in any given space, as they interact with the other works chosen for display around them. The ‘dynamics of viewing’ are at play as the objects within a curated space constantly converse with each other, their individual stories coming together under a collective roof.<sup>177</sup> This would suggest that in being placed within a group, particular objects risk losing an aspect of their meaning, or at least have it diminished in favour of a stronger thematic link.<sup>178</sup> Such dynamics need to be taken into consideration when analysing the artist’s book within a particular space.

Writing on the impact of environment in a specifically art historical voice, and even more so focussed upon the artist book genre, is uncommon. Jae Rossman writes of the interpretation of the artist’s book in particular, speaking of the librarian or curator unavoidably ‘mediating’ the experience of a work.<sup>179</sup> In an institutional setting, a private experience can be forced to become a public one.<sup>180</sup> The perceived presence of other objects within the environment, and the omnipresent authoritative curator, can greatly influence the ways in which one feels able to interpret and experience an artist’s book.

Identifying Herel’s books as art objects, the assumption might be made that his work is best housed in a gallery. However, to apply this as a blanket statement is a naïve approach, as obvious issues arise when considering the artist’s book’s exhibition and display. Though the tactility of the book in hand encourages sensual experience, touch, as an interpretive methodology, this is not facilitated by the gallery context, whether viewing the work as part of a permanent display, temporary exhibition, or in the collection study room.<sup>181</sup> Consequently, I argue that the experience of encountering an artist’s book in such an environment feeds into attitudes of the artist’s book as esoteric object—unable to hold the object and navigate through it themselves, the viewer is left at a distance that restricts interpretation, obviating the essence of the object. Furthermore, the public gallery is a

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<sup>176</sup> Pearce, op cit., 211, 15-16.

<sup>177</sup> Pearce writes that objects within an exhibited collection are “actors in the story, not just a reflection of action”.

Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 211.

<sup>178</sup> Riggins shares this opinion, referring to the term ‘co-location’: “the meaning of an artefact is influenced by the qualities of the surrounding or co-located artefacts. Consequently, the same artefact may illicit radically different readings depending upon the setting in which it is displayed”.

Stephen H. Riggins, ed., *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 114.

<sup>179</sup> Jae Rossman, “Reading Outside the Lines: Paratextual Analysis and Artists’ Books,” *Journal of Artists’ Books* 23 (2008): 23.

<sup>180</sup> Rossman continues to compare the ‘private epitext’ and ‘public epitext’ of the artist’s book. Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> The exploration of touch as interpretive methodology, and the application of this methodology to Herel’s work, will be further discussed later in this chapter.

space inherently occupied by other people—fellow patrons, educational groups, and, even if a quiet day, security personnel. It is a space occupied by others, a public space. This continued presence of other individuals makes it difficult to have an intimate encounter with the work of art. The busyness of the space, also heightened by the presence of other objects and their curatorially emphasised links, adds additional, if distracting, stimuli. To engage with Herel's work in a gallery is markedly different from undertaking the same project alone.

The gallery context *does* present several benefits when considering the collection, display, and experience of Herel's books. In a gallery setting, for instance, the book is certainly not overlooked as mundane, everyday object. The environment of the gallery is one that creates in its visitors a sense of awe and interest. There is a feeling of reverence, a sense that can be linked to the notion of the museum or gallery as a spiritually and intellectually valuable institution.<sup>182</sup> Objects within the gallery are inherently valuable simply by being there, by having been chosen.<sup>183</sup> The curatorial process has imbued them with an assumed significance. In a gallery context, Herel's work benefits from avoiding the danger of being overlooked by a habitual attitude towards the traditional book codex.

Institutional focus upon exhibition is another positive influence of the gallery context upon the interpretation of Herel's work. Though a number of libraries do have exhibition spaces, institutions like the National Gallery of Australia specifically focus on highlighting works from their collections.<sup>184</sup> Consequently, Herel's work may have an increased chance of being exhibited in the gallery compared to the library, where it must wait to be requested for viewing by specifically interested individuals or put on limited display. Though the

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<sup>182</sup> Pearce writes of a direct correlation between the decline of the church and rise in museum interest: "it is no accident, either, that the museum as an institution gathers momentum in a rising curve which corresponds to the declining curve of the intellectual and institutional power of religion to provide adequate narratives and their physical depositories: museums rose steadily through to the early nineteenth century as churches declined." As such, it might be argued that during the decline of the church, the museum stepped forward and was transferred some of its lasting power, which has contributed to the hushed, respectful atmosphere within gallery spaces.

Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 92.

<sup>183</sup> As Dewey writes: "the growth of capitalism has been a powerful influence in the development of the museum as the proper home for works of art, and in the promotion of the idea that they are apart from the common life".

John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934), 8.

<sup>184</sup> As per the *National Gallery Act* of 1975, the National Gallery of Australia is required to:

- develop and maintain a national collection of works of art
- exhibit, or make available for exhibition by others, works of art from the national collection or works of art that are in the possession of the Gallery, and
- use every endeavour to make the most advantageous use of the national collection in the national interest.

Office of Parliamentary Counsel, Canberra, "National Gallery Act 1975," 61 C2014C00525 § (1974) 3-4.

gallery context does benefit the artist's book in several ways, this is outweighed by the interpretation facilitated in a library environment.

The library establishment has roots deep in tradition and culture.<sup>185</sup> While it can be argued that libraries demand a certain amount of submissiveness of their visitors, in the case of Herel's work this focussed atmosphere allows the extended experience of his books.<sup>186</sup> The prescribed need for silence in the library environment is conducive to a sense of interiority. This sense of privacy is heightened by the consideration of the library as a 'kinetic landscape',<sup>187</sup> a space inextricably linked to quiet, individual motions—the gathering of books, the turning of pages, the taking of notes, the thinking of thoughts. Furthermore, the library setting importantly has the ability to create an environment associated with comfort, despite, in the case of the National Library of Australia, being a large institution. The library environment, with individual spaces, comfortable chairs and thick carpeting, creates a space closer to the intimacy one associates with being 'at home', thus creating an intimate space in which to interact with Herel's work. As a tactile object with emphasis placed on its physicality, the artist's book lends itself to terms such as pleasure, self, and self-indulgence. To engage with these feelings, the viewer requires comfort. Though the National Library of Australia is a public institution, by giving individuals a sense of personal space it comes closer to fostering a more private interaction compared to its gallery counterpart, in which walls are kept neutral and distance from works is both mandated and enforced.

Though I argue the library environment to be more conducive to the thorough analysis of Herel's work, it is certainly not a perfect solution.<sup>188</sup> The inclusion of the artist's book in a larger library catalogue creates a complex context. At institutions such as the National Library of Australia, Herel's work risks being associated with, and treated as, conventional books rather than art objects.<sup>189</sup> As previously determined, the book as art object faces difficulties in being treated as a conventional, abstracted information carrier. Yet perhaps it is this challenge that emphasises the unique intricacies of Herel's work. In direct

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<sup>185</sup> Mehrabian writes that the library is largely associated with an "ancient, honourable history". Albert Mehrabian, *Public Places and Private Spaces: The Psychology of Work, Play, and Living Environments* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1976), 162.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>187</sup> Harold Rosenberg, *Art & Other Serious Matters* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 14.

<sup>188</sup> The Library of Congress only created an artist's book subject heading in 2003, and their definition remains vague: "here are entered books that are produced by artists and intended as visual art objects, and general works about such books"—it is certainly not just literature and galleries that have issues with defining the artist's book.

"Artists' Books: Library of Congress Subject Headings," Library of Congress, 2017, <http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects/sh85008302.html>.

<sup>189</sup> To view Herel's work at the National Library, a reader must be monitored in the Special Collections Reading Room, and artist's book is treated with particular care. From the perspective of an outside party viewing the Library's online catalogue, however, Herel's work is within the larger, general database.

comparison to more conventional books in the collection, the aberrant differences of Herel's work emphasises the aberrant quality of the artist's book. Rather than being lost, the artist's book stands out, and the smallest of subversions are made blatant.

"Books are very robust objects, really," comments Philip Jackson, Senior Librarian in the printed Australiana section of the National Library of Australia.<sup>190</sup> The National Library works to make material immediately available to researchers, and in this case immediate can be implied to mean both available for access as soon as possible, but also available for comprehensive access. In the case of the artist's book, this involves readers being able to touch works in the Special Collections Reading Room. Conservation is a consideration, but it is Jackson's perspective that in requesting an artist's book from the catalogue, "it should be...much the same as using any other research material from the collection".<sup>191</sup> The library environment offers a more hands-on interpretive experience, which is appropriate in considering the particularly haptic qualities of the artist's book. The National Library of Australia specifically acknowledges Herel's presence as a significant Canberran identity, and has a focused interest in works the artist created in Canberra under Labyrinth Press.<sup>192</sup> Further applicable to the artist, Jackson notes their practice of collecting artists' books that are "a little more book-like".<sup>193</sup> The traditional sensibility and sensitivity of Herel's work, an obvious reference to the historical book codex, is aligned with such a policy. Speaking with a key figure in the collection of Herel's work in a library context, it is evident that the traditional methods of library collection and display are beneficial to the artist's work, and reflect Herel's sensitivity towards the traditional book.

The artist's own opinions of the collection and exhibition of his work mirror this lean towards a library environment. This is, at least, his opinion in respect to contemporary collecting practices. Herel comments that particularly in Canberra, there is competition between institutions, and a particular interest in each institution having different works.<sup>194</sup> If a single book is suitable for more than one institution, the artist feels both should have copies.<sup>195</sup> Nevertheless, Herel supports the argument that a gallery faces difficulties when exhibiting artists' books—when placed behind glass, the audience "[has] no feeling for the paper".<sup>196</sup> He posits that the library is more appropriate due to its sensitivity towards the

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<sup>190</sup> Philip Jackson, Interview with Philip Jackson, National Library of Australia, June 2016.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

conventional codex.<sup>197</sup> Herel speaks of the important “private space” created when turning pages, and how in this moment of contact one feels “exactly alone”.<sup>198</sup> This supports the argument that the library facilitates a private interaction between viewer and object. Herel dismisses the idea of an ideal audience as calculated by the number of people who have seen his work: “now...they [institutions] are always counting hits, how many people saw it, how many people have seen it? [This] measure of value [is] nonsense”.<sup>199</sup> The artist believes that his work being exposed to more people is not necessarily a mark of success, instead celebrating the value of individual interaction, even if only undertaken by a few viewers. Unlike the traditional gallery environment, the library facilitates this focused, individual experience by giving permission to touch, interact, and spend extended periods of time alone with the artist’s work.

Reflecting attempts to clearly define the artist’s book, interrogating the type of collection best suited to house Herel’s work is complex. Each environment has its own advantages and disadvantages. Considering the argued necessities of touch, privacy and intimacy, and Herel’s own comments on the matter, I argue that in this case a library context provides the most interpretive scope in which to experience the artist’s work. This is again not a definitive answer, as people cannot be assumed to behave uniformly within the same environment.<sup>200</sup> However, by having the ability to facilitate a private interaction that engages with touch and slow looking, the library facilitates the widest array of the interpretive experiences proposed by this dissertation. One might ask how an institution acts upon Herel’s artists’ books. Yet, as made evident by this examination, one must also ask how Herel’s artists’ books act upon an institution.

Exploring environmental influence and practices of collection and display, it becomes evident that this dissertation uses the aberrance of the artist’s book to generate a new institutional critique. Importantly, this critique is not restricted to the artist’s book specifically, but can be extended to apply to other art objects that challenge institutional practices. The artist’s book demonstrates the value of intimacy for interpretation. In contrast to a gallery environment, the library allows the viewer to hold the artist’s book in hand, to feel its weight, and move through the pages in a manner not restricted by the need for gloves or distance. The same restrictions would be in place for a viewer engaging with any other art object, limited by conservation concerns and policy. In this way, this new

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Albert Mehrabian, *Public Places and Private Spaces: The Psychology of Work, Play, and Living Environments* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1976), 4.

institutional critique uses the artist's book to identify a problem not exclusive to the genre. The artist's book exposes a problem inherent to the gallery or museum through and by its aberrance.

To allow for an intimacy between viewer and artist's book is to facilitate the subjective interpretation inherent to the book as object in hand. One of Herel's books can act in a variety of capacities, and different people can act with it in a variety of ways. As R. D. Laing (1927-1989) wrote: "I cannot experience your experience. You cannot experience my experience. We are both invisible men. All men are invisible to one another".<sup>201</sup> Laing's words are valuable here as they reiterate the notion of individual interpretation. The artist's book benefits from this focus on subjectivity, as every viewing can differ depending on viewer and environment. In this way, the artist's book is an inexhaustible object, and by acknowledging this, the viewer becomes aware of all the other, previously 'invisible' possibilities around them.

It should also be acknowledged that library and gallery are not the only options when discussing the collection and display of Herel's work. Further placing significance upon intimate experience, the private collection is an influential environment. Indeed, the act of personal collecting, compared to institutional processes, lends itself to the aberrant. It seems strange that a gathering of objects can be so inextricably linked to one's personality and sense of self. The emotional drive to collect is a complex and individual one.<sup>202</sup>

Alongside the library, the personal collection presents a productive environment in which to interpret Herel's work. It facilitates intimacy by providing an unlimited amount of time to interact with a work, and the ability to do so in an intimate, non-institutional environment. Stephen H. Riggins proposes five 'root metaphors' of collecting: "collecting is hunting; collecting is therapy; collecting is passion, desire; collecting is a disease; collecting is supernatural experience".<sup>203</sup> All of these metaphors are indicative of personal commitment and intimacy. By studying the act of collecting, one is undertaking "an investigation into an aspect of human experience".<sup>204</sup> A private collection is also less influenced by display changeover. Reflecting personal choice, time is made malleable, as

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<sup>201</sup> Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 218.

<sup>202</sup> Of his own library, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) wrote: "the most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them".

Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 60.

<sup>203</sup> Stephen H. Riggins, ed., *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 36.

<sup>204</sup> Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An investigation into collecting in the European tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 4.

one is not dictated by exhibition timelines and institutional development but by their own desires. In the personal collection it is the owner and their viewer who control time, rather than the institution or perceived social norms. This slowing of time is particularly conducive to slow looking, an innovative temporal methodology later argued valuable to the understanding of Herel's practice.<sup>205</sup> The interpretation of Herel's work is closely linked to subjective experience, to the encounter, and to the experience of the encounter. The personal collection is another productive environment in which to engage with his books.

The benefits of interpreting work in personal collections are evident when speaking to Canberran private art collector Peter Jones. Curiously, Jones refers to the artist's book as a medium he celebrates as physically "accessible".<sup>206</sup> Importantly, this is in relation to Jones' specific interest in conceptual and performance art, as in many cases the book offers a more affordable option than larger paintings and prints, and acts as the lasting documentation of past performance. Yet, for Jones, this idea of artist's book as accessible extends beyond conceptual performance. It has not only affected personal collecting practices, but has contributed to a larger personal dedication to accessibility, with the collector and his partner Susan Taylor exhibiting shows in their 'Spare Room 33' in-house gallery from 2013. Supporting the argument of static, two-page exhibitiv spread as unsuitable for artist book display, Jones comments:

...it's amazing to see these things out because one of our specific [problems]...is when you see artists' books displayed in galleries, they're either displayed under glass, in which case you can see one or two pages, or they've been videoed and you can see the pages turning...but again...you're not handling them, you can't change the pace, you can't go back, you can't go back and look at another page. So I find it incredibly unsatisfactory the way artists' books are shown in galleries...<sup>207</sup>

Jones' comments solidify the personal collection as another productive environment in which to engage with the artist's book. While individuals are able to care for their collection, they are also able to create their own rules regarding handling and display, free of prescribed rules and regulations. Though this might result in private collections kept fiercely private, Jones and Taylor demonstrate the potential of a private collection to turn a removed viewing through glass into a sensual experience in hand.

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<sup>205</sup> Slow looking will be examined at length and applied as a key methodology to the analysis of Herel's books in Chapter Two.

<sup>206</sup> Peter Jones, Interview with Peter Jones, May 2016.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.



The analysis of these three collecting spheres—the gallery, the library and the personal—poses the significant question of who the audience for Herel’s work truly is, and whether an audience is even necessary. The artist book genre is a niche one, as fundamentally demonstrated by the lack of concrete definition. Herel agrees with this statement: “[artists’ books] always had, are having and will have (in my opinion) limited ‘audience’ ”.<sup>208</sup> The artist identifies a few “enthusiastic people” who keep the artist book genre active, but notes that this is a particularly limited audience, as reflected by the small amount of public institutions actively collecting his work.<sup>209</sup> Exposing artists’ books to the greater public, thereby building audience, requires their exhibition and display. Herel states that this has been difficult due to an attitude of the book as “last in [the] spectrum” of art forms.<sup>210</sup> The artist’s book is victim to a continued hierarchy of genres in the arts.

Herel identifies the artist’s book simultaneous engagement with art and literature as problematic in regard to audience. The book as artistic medium challenges the viewer to consider the book in a new light. As the artist’s book rests between art and literature, so does the viewer who engages with it. Herel writes:

In realising [the] limited “audience” or “readership” of Artist’s Books we are probably touching [the] basic reason why [the] Artist Book [sic] sits so uncomfortably between visual art and literature, between ‘Art audience’ and ‘Readership of books’: the ‘Art Audience’ is not necessary oriented towards reading and ‘Readers’ are not necessary enthusiastic art viewers...<sup>211</sup>

The artist’s book is an object that is demanding of its audience. To become one of its audience members, a viewer is required to reflect upon the very act of interpretation itself, and be aware of the space they must inhabit between viewer and reader. As such, there is no ideal audience of the artist’s book, but a necessity for those who do approach the object to be open to its complexities.

#### *Value—Social, Cultural, and Personal*

The analysis of audience inevitably poses questions of value, a concept heavy with economic associations. Yet in this regard the artist’s book’s aberrance continues, as the market for such objects is niche and collectors are often private. As such, gathering

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<sup>208</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, January 30, 2016.

<sup>209</sup> Herel makes note of the ‘exceptional’ interest of the National Gallery of Australia’s Senior Curator of Australian Prints and Drawings Roger Butler in the face of this perceived general disinterest.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

information on the sales of such objects is difficult, reflected by recent auction records only listing the outcome of a few individual print sales of Herel's work.<sup>212</sup> Consequently, the artist's book demands the interpreter engage with other considerations of value—attributions of social, cultural and personal worth. The artist himself creates links between audience and different perceptions of worth, commenting upon a lack of interest in collecting his work as possibly due to a focus upon other, more visible, media:

[I am] probably simplifying a bit, but...I think people are buying paintings because they...[can put] it onto a wall, [it is seen as a] so called 'investment'— [they are] wanting to show off on wall, [their] friends see it, [and they can say] 'look what we have, who we bought last week'.<sup>213</sup>

Here the artist references both social and cultural value assessments of art. The more popular work he is speaking of (assumed to be a painting on canvas) is expensive. Collectors are able to easily and continuously show it off to their social circle, and able to associate themselves with a well-known artist. In contrast, the artist's book is:

...much more private, not visible, take[n] from shelf, library, cupboard...few people who are interested in books come together [to show each other]...[it] doesn't really happen.<sup>214</sup>

Examining the social and cultural implications of Herel's books interrogates not only the value of the artist's work but also how the artist's work acts upon notions of value. While the limited edition nature of the artist's book might lend it a perceived air of exclusivity, the book as art object challenges traditional ideas of displaying art and suggesting wealth. The artist's book is not easily hung on a wall, nor the concept of book as art object an easy topic of discussion.

A social assessment of value makes it evident that worth is not just objectively numerical but also an experiential and subjective concept. Requiring a highly personal engagement with the book as art object, Herel's work can be attributed a social significance.<sup>215</sup> Those

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<sup>212</sup> The auction database artrecord.com only lists several records for sales of Herel's work, including the individual prints *Anthropomorphic Horse* (1976) auctioned by Leonard Joel in August 2000, and *Three Eyes* (1970) also sold by Joel in November 1999.

"Petr Herel," Australian Art Auction Records, 2017, <https://www.artrecord.com/index.cfm/artist/9970-herel-petr/>.

<sup>213</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Pearce claims this subjective social value is unique to the art sphere: "...notions of value developed purely in relation to ideas about the nature of exchange are of limited use where museum material is concerned, because museum objects have (at least in theory) been lifted out of the market-place where commodities are exchanged and have become something else, to which a word like 'heritage' is often attached...Museum objects...may be enormously valuable in the market-place or...they may be worth relatively little, but this is

with a preference for factual, economic assessment may find this more conceptual attribution difficult, but the aberrant artist's book continues to demand new interpretive pathways. The concept of an object's 'social biography' needs to be discussed in relation to the assessment of Herel's work as socially valuable.<sup>216</sup> Here, a different criterion with which to assess an object's worth is presented, approaching value through a sociological paradigm, and analysing the life of the object much like one would the life of a human:

What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its [the object's] 'status' and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realised? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognised 'ages' or periods in the thing's life, and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?<sup>217</sup>

Objects have stories. The artist's book not only contains the text of others but also has an individual story of its own. Objects like the artist's book have their own histories, which not only comprise the process of their creation but also their movements and interactions within the world after this. The artist's book suggests its journey through the creasing of paper, the bending of spine and the presence of fingerprints—it is an object that has interacted, socialised, with a variety of people. One can ask the questions listed above of Herel's work as they might converse with another person when getting to know them: where are you from? What is your job? With whom do you associate? By asking these questions, the artist's book is given autonomy. This autonomy is necessary in understanding the artist's book as an experiential object. A social approach to valuing Herel's work not only involves the viewer's subjective interpretation, but the personality of the object itself.

An attitude of embracing these stories of the object is the Japanese concept of *wabi-sabi*. The aesthetic, with roots in Zen philosophy, is one that celebrates things "imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete".<sup>218</sup> One element of *wabi-sabi* is the process of *kintsugi*

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not the point; whatever their monetary exchange value, they share a perceived spiritual or intellectual worth and are guarded as such in a way which puts them in a special 'otherworld' category". Pearce is describing another kind of value system to which art objects can be assessed.

Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 33.

<sup>216</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>218</sup> Leonard Koren, *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers* (California: Imperfect Publishing, 2008), 7.

(‘golden joinery’), in which artists mend broken ceramic pieces with a golden resin.<sup>219</sup> The resulting object is one that emphasises the beauty of its history. *Kintsugi* is the art of embracing damage, as golden veins visibly trace lines of imperfection. In this sense, the concept refuses to see damage as damage, but as a sort of accidental growth. This attitude, of valuing the life of an object others may perceive as damaged, can be likened to Herel’s treatment of cancelled plates. The artist’s interest in presenting the new visual forms created by his envelope-like cancellation lines mirrors *kintsugi*’s interest in the continuing life of the object—in Herel’s case both the finished book and the plate itself. The lines of Herel’s cancellation, that do not destroy the plate but mark another stage in its life, mirror the golden lines of *kintsugi* repairs both aesthetically and conceptually. For Herel’s practice, both the plate worked and re-worked by his hand and the book later handled by viewers contribute to a social biography, and socially informed value, of the object.

*Zánebí Slov* (1970-80) is an exemplary case study for the autonomous social history or biography of an artist’s book (Fig. 5a-b). Herel made the work over a period of ten years, resulting in 283 drawings in a range of media including pen, oil paint, coloured pencil, and coloured inks over 284 pages.<sup>220</sup> The artist had a large quantity of unused blotting paper and other found sheets bound together, with the aim of taking the codex with him on his travels and gradually making additions over time. The book travelled across continents, visiting six cities: Prague, Rome, Paris, Beaune, Melbourne and Canberra, and provided a space for creating imagery when the artist felt mentally or physically disconnected from printmaking.<sup>221</sup> In the hope of maintaining a sense of continuity, Herel did not add drawings chronologically, rather skipping between pages so that his varying compositions and choice of media would create a cohesive final product that did not encourage a linear reading from front to back (Fig. 5c-d).<sup>222</sup> Aside from being light, the choice of draft-like blotting paper encouraged Herel to create drawings in an automatic fashion, without any predetermined plan and with no restrictive deadline.<sup>223</sup> The result is a one-off work that has a history of its own, traveling with the artist over an extended period of time. The artist’s

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<sup>219</sup> Blake Gopnik, “‘Golden Seams: The Japanese Art of Mending Ceramics’ at Freer,” *Washington Post Online*, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/02/AR2009030202723.html>.

<sup>220</sup> Anne Gray, *Petr Herel: An Exhibition of Artists Books at the National Library of Australia 22 March-30 June 1989* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1989), 9.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>223</sup> It also gave the artist an opportunity to experiment—some of the pages features swirling dark ink with a subtle sheen, the result of Herel freezing Indian ink to mimic the effect of icy forms on windows when cold outside and warm inside. Such experimentation inspired later photograms in which the artist mimicked this new freezing process.

*Ibid.*

book not only represents Herel's preoccupations; it becomes a space that reflects time and place.

*Zánebí Slov* further demonstrates an autonomy of the book as the artist had to work to the constraints of a pre-bound codex. While the majority of the pages are of blotting paper, reminiscent of childhood schoolbooks and exercises, scattered throughout *Zánebí Slov* are other paper types. Some are irregularly shaped, with curving edges that only take up half the space of the more standardised blotting sheets, while others are brightly coloured and embossed. Herel comments that his interest in the varying styles has changed over time, with some reflecting particular trends from the 1970s that are not necessarily aligned with his current tastes.<sup>224</sup> Yet, the artist still worked to the pages in the codex, demonstrating the book's autonomy by demanding the artist work to the predetermined form.

At the core of *Zánebí Slov* rests a stone from Herel's home country of Czechoslovakia, with sheets cut so the form remains a constant at the centre of changing pages (Fig. 5e). The stone came from the fields near Herel's home, and ties the artist's interest in stones to his artist book practice.<sup>225</sup> This fascination comes from thinking of the movement of stones from the large mountains around the artist's house down to the riverbed in the fields below.<sup>226</sup> A small form that has undertaken a migration from the majestic to the quiet, the stone represents an overlooked presence—an object presumed to be static and yet upon further consideration embodies movement. Herel's inclusion of this particular rock in the book can be interpreted as his consciousness of the movement and story of the object.<sup>227</sup> There is certainly an analogy to be made here between this interest in the individual journey of the stone and the importance of considering the autonomous life of the individual artist's book.

Finally, Herel's plans to leave many of his books, *Zánebí Slov* included, to his daughters emphasises the validity of considering the social biography of the artist's book in relation to the artist's practice. *Zánebí Slov* is a unique, one-off work that Herel intends to leave with family rather than a public collection.<sup>228</sup> The book is evidently of personal importance, and the artist has made a conscious effort to determine its future path. This dedication to the book's posterity greatly reflects its individual significance. *Zánebí Slov* is a fruitful case study to argue the necessity of analysing the social biography and value of the artist's book.

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<sup>224</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> The significance of the stone is emphasised by the artist's acknowledgement that including the form in the middle of the book proved to be a complicated process.

Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

Considering the individual story of the book creates the opportunity for additional interpretation, and mimics the artist's own consciousness of each book's future.

Arguing the artist's book's larger social significance, Rubbish Theory can be innovatively applied to extend analysis of the book's social value. Rubbish Theory proposes that the attribution of value is a socially dynamic process, with objects assigned a different value depending on their cycle through a perceived shelf life.<sup>229</sup> It is especially concerned with the fate of objects once they are considered 'finished with', no longer useful in the eyes of the consumer (hence 'rubbish'—the term questions how we identify an object as rubbish, and how our behaviour towards such an object then changes).<sup>230</sup> Once society at large has labelled a work, the ways in which it is 'socially processed' become deeply entrenched.<sup>231</sup> This processing results in a limited interpretive perspective:

Rubbish theory clearly demonstrates that all [views] are restrictive in the sense that, once we have latched on to one way of seeing things, we have also latched on to not seeing things in other ways...Does the category membership of an object determine the way we act towards it, or does the way we act towards an object determine its category membership?<sup>232</sup>

Herel's artist book practice presents a complex case when addressing this question. The traditional book is an object that is socially processed as reference material or fiction. However, one of Herel's works cannot be valued purely for its informative value—that is, it is not simply a vessel for information one can then apply elsewhere, but an autonomous work of art. Furthermore, there is no clear manner in which to respond to this point of difference, contributing to an overarching sense of aberrance. Again, Herel's books challenge society's method of understanding and assessing value through categorisation. Ironically, Herel's work is socially valuable in its lack of obvious or immediate social value. Using Rubbish Theory to lay the groundwork for the notion of the social life of the object, the artist's book exposes the inflexible rigidity of standard attitudes towards value.

As demonstrated by the application of Rubbish Theory to the analysis of the artist's book, examining the aberrance of Herel's work presents the opportunity for innovative interdisciplinary analysis. This is further evident in the application of Bill Brown's Thing

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<sup>229</sup> Michael Thompson, *Rubbish Theory: the Creation and Destruction of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 2.

<sup>230</sup> Rubbish Theory was first comprehensively discussed by Michael Thompson in 1979 in his text *Rubbish Theory: the Creation and Destruction of Value*. Thompson assigns three identifiers for the object—"valuable, valueless, and negatively valued".

*Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 133, 7.

Theory to assess the social value of Herel's work. Brown's thesis does not diminish the art object by identifying it as a 'thing', rather emphasising the individual qualities of the thing in being an autonomous material object.<sup>233</sup> It is a celebration of the thing for its very 'thingness', for its physical existence, reflecting the inherent physicality of the artist's book. Furthermore, the artist's book represents a double thing-ness: the matrix or plate, and the bound product. These things are a tangible representation, a physical manifestation, of the innate human need to create: "it is far more than history...that lies somehow within, somewhere within, the object materialized by human attention".<sup>234</sup> The essential act of creation, the making of a thing by man, is immediately valuable as it is representative of a communicated idea.<sup>235</sup> Applying Thing Theory to the artist's book facilitates interpretation that recognises the importance of the physical object in hand and the larger conceptual themes it addresses. It also bestows value upon the singular object's contribution as a valuable thread in the larger social fabric of contemporary life. This influences new interpretations of the artist's book, by valuing an examination of the physicality of the book as art object and encouraging focus upon the smaller nuances that together contribute to a larger aberrant complexity.

Mirroring the term 'social biography of things', the 'cultural biography' of objects is also relevant to a new analysis of Herel's aberrant artists' books.<sup>236</sup> The argument of a cultural value of art is evident in the very language used to describe artworks—terms such as 'masterpiece', 'craftsmanship', and 'authenticity' all have their roots in a cultural assessment deeply entrenched in tradition.<sup>237</sup> An object is culturally marked or identified as a particular thing, thus being allocated a place within the world we create around us.<sup>238</sup> In light of such comments, Herel's work presents a unique case—the artist's book, without a widely accepted definition, is difficult to consistently label and organise. It fluctuates between different references and methods of interpretation without ever finding comfortable respite in one category. There is no specific unit or criterion against which to judge Herel's work. Its cultural value is therefore that it creates a space for interdisciplinary, creative analysis. This is demonstrated by the application of 'revelatory seeing' to the contemporary artist's

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<sup>233</sup> Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 1–22.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>235</sup> Brown comments: "Taken literally, the belief that there are ideas in things amounts to granting them an interiority and, thus, something like the structure of subjectivity".

*Ibid.*, 7–8.

<sup>236</sup> Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995), 25.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>238</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64.

book as a method with which to engage with the aberrance of a simultaneously open and closed object.

Inspired by the cultural value and context of Herel's work, I argue that a significant point of reference when examining the aberrant artist's book is that of the sacred object. Exploring ideas of the sensual experience and the intimate thrill of collecting validates the examination of Herel's artists' books as ceremonial objects. The ceremonial object is one that is removed from everyday life. Its spiritual quality creates a sense of aura.<sup>239</sup> This aura is analogous to my overarching argument of the artist's book as aberrant object, as both are the result of a sense of otherness. Attributing Herel's work the cultural value and aura of a sacred object is facilitated through what will this thesis terms 'revelatory seeing', linking the artist's book to the sacred altarpiece. In Herel's work, the act of revelatory seeing is twofold: physical, harking back to traditional ideas of the covered object and the altarpiece, and; conceptual, playing with ideas of the personal through diary and handwriting.

The book *Rosedale* (1989), by Thierry Bouchard and Petr Herel, exemplifies the ceremonial act of physical revelation. The envelope encasing the inner pages of the book is tantalisingly folded, with top and bottom flaps almost touching (Fig. 6a-c). This potential energy is reminiscent of Adam and God's barely separated fingers on the roof of the Sistine Chapel—the frisson of that space, the possibility of touch energising the empty space between fingertips. *Rosedale's* envelope corners lift outwards, reaching into my space and inviting touch (Fig. 6d-e). Through this physical extension, these corners hint at the revelation ahead—that of unfolding the cover and viewing the inner sheets. Viewing this closed object incites a feeling of suspense and anticipation. I will be able to personally uncover what has been intentionally hidden.

While newly applied to the artist's book, this notion of the physical revelation in art is rooted in the historical tradition of religious altarpieces. First produced in the early fourteenth century, the *flügelaltar*, or winged altarpiece, originated in the Netherlands and Germany.<sup>240</sup> Polyptych scenes were dependent on the opening and closing of winged panels surrounding the key image, and such movements were conducted according to events of liturgical significance, creating a sense of reverent ceremony.<sup>241</sup> Subsequently, viewing opened works such as the canonical *Isenheim Altarpiece*, from sixteenth century Germany, was to experience a holy moment (Fig. 7). Contemporary calls to reassemble the

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<sup>239</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 69.

<sup>240</sup> Colum Hourihane, "Altarpiece," *The Grove Encyclopaedia of Medieval Art and Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.



*Isenheim* work so that each panel may once again touch its original neighbour demonstrate the significance of revelation to the altarpiece's viewing.<sup>242</sup> This act of revelation is demonstrably a significant feature of Herel's artists' books, and necessary to understanding the aberrant book as culturally valuable.

Interacting with *Rosedale* is akin to the worship of a changing altarpiece. The form of the book is similarly transformed through the act of an opening. The exterior envelope of the work is very much a part of the object, given evident aesthetic consideration with the delicate swirls of blue and green algae-like prints at the bottom of the card. The envelope is not just a barrier between artwork and viewer, or a simple vessel encasing important contents. Similar to the oft-intricate framing and decoration of historic altarpieces, *Rosedale*'s envelope participates as part of the artwork itself. It creates a feeling of ceremony and reverence in its symbolic covering and the very act of a physical opening. The necessary act of revelation makes me acutely aware of the contribution my individual movements make to the activation of the book. In light of this link to revelatory seeing, the artist's book engages with the viewer both physically and conceptually, reiterating the overarching liminality of the genre.

The artist's book *Fragments d'une Première Version d'Aurélia* (1994) uses text from Gérard de Nerval's (1808-1855) attempt to put his madness in writing.<sup>243</sup> The mere inclusion of this particular text incites a feeling of revelation. The writing is a physical manifestation of mental illness, de Nerval's description of his own tortuous psychological landscape an attempt to navigate between reality and dream state. Herel's interpretation of this text makes revelation tangibly visible. The text in the book is presented in its original form, and the manuscript resembles that of a raw diary (Fig. 8a-b). Engaging with the idea of revelation, the very idea of the diary is closely linked to privacy and interiority. Writing in a diary is an intimate act, whether enjoyable or cathartic. As the book can be closed, it moderates who has access to the contents, thus making the diary symbolic of the innermost personal. The diary is a physical manifestation of a life, an existence, demonstrated throughout history by the likes of Virginia Woolf and Anne Frank to Susan

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<sup>242</sup> Stanley Meisler, "A Masterpiece Born of Saint Anthony's Fire," *Smithsonian Magazine*, 1999, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/a-masterpiece-born-of-saint-anthonys-fire-57103499/>.

<sup>243</sup> *Aurélia* was de Nerval's 'autobiographical novella' written at the suggestion of psychiatrist Dr. Emile Blanche, while the writer was residing in an asylum having been diagnosed insane. Blanche requested de Nerval transcribe his dreams, and the resulting text is a manifestation of de Nerval's internal struggle in wanting to abide by Blanche's instructions but also prove his sanity in the hopes of release. De Nerval was writing of his thoughts but was aware of those reading them, which can be seen as analogous to Herel creating books knowing viewers will be touching them.

Allan Beveridge, "The Madness of Gerard de Nerval," *Medical Humanities* 40, no. 1 (May 16, 2014): 38.

Sontag, among others.<sup>244</sup> I first participate in the act of revelation when opening the book, and later when considering the contents within.

Mirroring a personal notebook, *Fragments* appears stuffed thick with pages, reminiscent of an ephemeral trail of the everyday—receipts, notes to self, lists. The choice of paper, textured only on the edges touched to turn pages, creates a well-worn, well-read aesthetic. This wear suggests a sense of passing time, of re-reading. Herel's choice to include the original writing could lead to the assumption that the book is de Nerval's original manuscript, but instead this is an object within an object, a diary within a book. The pages of de Nerval's manuscript are clearly marked on the page—I am presented with a page on a page, a page depicting a page. Again, Herel plays with the format of the traditional book codex.

Herel's choice to include the raw manuscript deviates from traditional literary convention, as the diary is arguably not historically recognised as a finished literary form. The diary is considered unserious, the diarist an emotional, self-indulgent figure. Kate Zambreno asserts:

The diary especially is read through the context of modernism as a form of automatic writing, but worse, of automatic feeling, it is the intensity of emotions expressed that seems to render it unserious, unliterary... This is because girls write in a diary.<sup>245</sup>

Such writing is associated with feminine hysteria instead of serious literature—it should not be published. By choosing to present de Nerval's asylum diary, Herel pointedly challenges the traditional book codex and the perceived promise it will contain a finished work.<sup>246</sup> By creating an object that is a physical manifestation of de Nerval's mental instability, Herel reinstates the personal into the book.

The original text's sacred revelation continues when examining the presence of de Nerval's handwriting. Graphology has ingrained the notion that one's handwriting can be studied to

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<sup>244</sup> See: Virginia Woolf, *Selected Diaries* (London: Vintage Classics, 2013); Anne Frank, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, trans. B.M. Mooyaart-Doubleday (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2002); Susan Sontag, *Reborn: Journals and Notebooks 1947-1963*, ed. David Rieff (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008).

<sup>245</sup> Kate Zambreno, *Heroines* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012), 276.

<sup>246</sup> Zambreno argues that contemporary criticism should see the diary as emotional but also a valid, literary output. Its subjective, personal, and emotive presence is not unliterary or uninformed, and therefore demands acknowledgement. Zambreno specifically focuses on the exclusion of female writers and diarists from the literary canon, and deems their absence partially a result of this idea that emotive and personal writing is indulgent and therefore ineffective. For more, see *Heroines*.

*Ibid.*

reveal personality traits.<sup>247</sup> Though criticised as an unorthodox psychology, the underlying idea of handwriting as a direct expression of one's hand is relevant to Herel's work.<sup>248</sup> Handwriting, as is the case with *Fragments*, is undeniably a visual representation of one's presence, even if not of one's personality. Like a print, it is an intentional series of marks. At its most fundamental, handwriting exists on paper because someone decided to pick up their quill or pen or pencil and write. As such, the autograph manuscript holds a revelatory power, as it documents the first, intimate meeting of ink to page, as opposed to a later edited version.

Herel includes stamps on the text pages of *Fragments*, which continue to graphically mark presence. Scattered throughout the work, these small circular forms are blotted and illegible. Alongside the handwriting, they further emphasise the presence of a hand at work—the physical act of stamping onto a page mirroring the bodily gestures required to write down thoughts. Mark making such as this is historically official, referencing the symbolism of signatures and stamps as legally documenting presence, assent, approval, and permission. The stamps throughout *Fragments* document de Nerval's presence. Herel's choice to include de Nerval's marks interweaves the artist's pronounced presence on the page with the writer's, twisting time and bringing the past into the present. Herel's later signature becomes not a traditional formality but a representation of the symbiotic relationship between de Nerval's words and Herel's practice. By denying an immediate economic value assessment, Herel's aberrant work requires the viewer to develop a new appreciation for the cultural value of the book as art object.

Finally, Herel's books can be attributed a personal value. This is entirely due to the experience of the encounter—the intimate nature of interpreting the artist's work.<sup>249</sup> It is the most abstract value assessment of Herel's work, as the attribution of personal value is entirely subjective, and has no clear system of measurement or method of explanation. To analyse Herel's work is to move between feelings of self-consciousness to self-awareness. The aberrant nature of one of Herel's works requires the viewer to challenge pre-conceived notions and open himself or herself to different ways of interpreting such an object. A feeling of achievement is accomplished in doing so—interrogating the innate need for one to 'decipher' to understand.<sup>250</sup> Instead, subjective imagination is key. Herel's work gives the

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<sup>247</sup> A. D. Heller, "Handwriting and Personality," *The British Medical Journal* 1 (1953): 607.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> This idea of the 'experience of the encounter' is the focus of Chapter Two.

<sup>250</sup> As writes Pearce: "the need to decipher gives us the chance both to bring out what is in the object and what is in ourselves; it is a dynamic, complex movement which unfolds as time passes, and in the act of interpretative imagination we give form to ourselves".

viewer the opportunity to create their own references, to notice different details, and to feel as though they are the first person to discover them, facilitated by the creation of an intimate interpretive space. The nuances of Herel's work do not scream out for attention, but are instead delicately and intentionally quiet. The viewer is an active participant in the work as they notice the subtleties. The artist's book and the viewer's imagination become a fused, symbiotic entity, the boundary between human and object a hazy blur.<sup>251</sup> Though one might assume an object deemed aberrant would obfuscate value and engagement, the intimacy of the artist's book that creates this aberrance in fact allows for a personal appreciation of value. This personal value contributes to the validation of a subjective, experiential analysis of the artist's book, a methodology developed in Chapter Two.

Having identified the artist's book as aberrant object and examining the elements that contribute to this attribution, one is able to query the analytical possibilities the new concept of artist's book as aberrant object presents. John Eisner and Roger Cardinal write:

Against the sleek amplifications engineered by scholarship and curatorial publicity that direct our admiration towards the treasure-houses and the masterpieces, we feel there is much to be learned by listening to the quieter, subversive voices rising out of that 'unacceptable' residue lying in culture's shadow.<sup>252</sup>

Herel's work incites the study of cultural residue—the forgotten or cast aside remnants, resting in the shadows. It is representative of a widely overlooked genre, but at the same time subverts its place within this genre by echoing traditional practice. It emphasises the value to be found in a challenging interpretive experience, the value of 'negative' emotion in art.<sup>253</sup> Herel's work celebrates a discomfort, a need for de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation, which has not previously been given academic credence.<sup>254</sup> Herel's artist book practice gives credibility to different manners of interpretation and subsequent explanation. The interpretation of the artist's book as aberrant object validates an expression of the subjective experience of the encounter.

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Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 220.

<sup>251</sup> Stephen H. Riggins, ed., *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 2.

<sup>252</sup> John Eisner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 5.

<sup>253</sup> In *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotion in Art*, Jerrold Levinson asks: "why do we want to look at distressing, emotionally exhausting art? Why should we?" Levinson argues that one's views of art, fiction and emotion are key influencing factors.

Jerrold Levinson, *Suffering Art Gladly: The Paradox of Negative Emotion in Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), xiv.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 58.

The ideas that influence Herel's creation of a book can be applied to one's interpretation of the finished work. This validates an examination of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose theories influence Herel's work and articulate another manner in which to explore the difficult terrain of the aberrant object.<sup>255</sup> In a 2015 interview, Herel identified that de Chardin's theories are of interest to him.<sup>256</sup> In *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955), de Chardin coins the term 'noosphere' (from the Greek *noos*, 'mind') to discuss the 'sphere of the mind', as compared to the 'sphere of life'.<sup>257</sup> The philosopher describes human advancement, that is increase in human population and communication, as inevitably leading to a society that is "more intense, more complex, and [having] more integrated mental activity".<sup>258</sup> Understanding the new complexities created by an advancing society made up of multifaceted individuals will bring further knowledge of man's path of progress. As such, an understanding of Herel's artists' books, however uncomfortable and defiant of definition, is valuable in reflecting advancements in the artist's individual process and the genre as a whole.

De Chardin writes of the necessary 'inner terror' to be experienced when opening one's eyes to a new world, a concept analogous to the aberrant encounter with Herel's work. The philosopher writes:

...for our mind to adjust itself to lines and horizons enlarged beyond measures, it must renounce the comfort of familiar narrowness. It must create a new equilibrium for everything that had formerly been so neatly arranged in its small inner world.<sup>259</sup>

This feeling of discomfort is necessary to encourage new understanding and discourage, or even displace, complacency. While Herel's work does not inspire terror specifically, it is befuddling. The complex thinking Herel applies to create his works does not yet have a suitably complex interpretive vocabulary or method of analysis with which to receive it. The anomalous quality of the artist's work reflects an advanced artist book practice that requires viewers to appreciate the experience created through subtle nuances. Herel is holding his own quiet revolution, creating the demand for new literature and interpretive methodologies following the viewer's awakening by incongruence.

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<sup>255</sup> De Chardin was French philosopher and priest "known for his theory that man is evolving, mentally and socially, toward a final spiritual unity".

"Pierre Teilhard de Chardin." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed March 17, 2016.  
<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Pierre-Teilhard-de-Chardin>.

<sup>256</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, August 2015.

<sup>257</sup> Julian Huxley, "Introduction," in *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), 13.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>259</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), 227.

Petr Herel's practice demands the articulation of the artist's book as aberrant object. It also calls for a new examination of aberrance in specific reference to the artist's book. In light of aforementioned theory and sociological frameworks, Herel's artists' books can be identified as specifically aberrant in several manners: they sit very close to traditional book formatting and do not immediately identify themselves as 'other'; despite being presented as a humble, recognisable object, they carry a heavy load in their lack of clear categorical belonging; they bring to question roles of reader and viewer without offering a clear solution; and they are simultaneously open and closed objects. The identification of the artist's book as aberrant object generates new discussion, including an institutional critique with wider implications for practices of object collection and display. The artist's book as aberrant object creates a space in which Herel's work can be placed within the discipline of art history—one that not only facilitates new discussion of the artist's work, but also calls for a contemporary examination of the aberrant object in art more broadly. The establishment of the artist's book as aberrant object creates a space in which the viewer can not only examine the work in hand but also reflect upon the subjectivity inherent to the individual experience of interpretation itself. Consequently, this understanding of aberrance creates a foundation from which to articulate a new and necessary experiential methodology to analyse Herel's work and the artist's book as a genre.

## Chapter Two

### The Experience of the Encounter

I have vivid memories of the time I first came across one of Petr Herel's books. I was an intern at the National Gallery of Australia with Australian Prints and Drawings, undertaking cataloguing projects. The work was *Excerpts from Inland* (2013). I remember how thin the paper was, and how it mirrored the delicate, ghost-like image repeatedly printed on the pages. The figure was unrecognisable, an anonymous floating mass. The text, taken from Gerald Murnane's novel, intensified this sense of unknowing through its complex language. I became aware of how carefully I was turning each page, so conscious of its fragility, yet also of my greedy ambition to see more. I was overwhelmed by the work's physicality; it had a quietly powerful presence. This was the encounter that sparked my interest in Herel's work: the book that marked the very beginning of this research.

This chapter has its origins in this memory, and articulates a new experiential methodology necessary to the interpretation of Herel's work. Conventional, objective analysis provides a limited means for interpreting the artist's book, as it does not give credence to the encounter with the art object. The artist's book is a sensuous object—haptic and affectively tactile. This argument presents the opportunity to propose an innovative combination of sensory and temporal methodologies to analyse the artist's book. Throughout this chapter I will conduct experiments to analyse the artist's book using methods including slow looking, repeated viewing, and touch, analysing field notes taken during these studies. Such methods have not before been applied to the analysis of the artist's book, or Herel's work in particular. Subsequent field notes taken during these experiments, and the discussion stemming from them, demonstrate the possibility for a phenomenological analysis of the aberrant artist's book that is scholarly, subjective and experiential. As Donald Preziosi reflects upon art history: "...the present text [art historical discourse] is itself a palimpsest".<sup>260</sup> The artist's book demands a necessary reassessment of the book as art object, through a paradigm combining both empiricism and theory. This chapter presents an original, combined methodology vital to the understanding of Herel's work—a new etching into the palimpsest of art history that engages with language, poetry and emotion.

It is interesting to note how readily one assumes the reality of the story being told within a conventional novel. The true reality in reading a book, however, is the physical encounter

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<sup>260</sup> Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), xiii.

with a tangible book object. Instead, the book is generalised as vehicle, a vessel for the story rather than object of direct engagement. It becomes an object removed; a floating, displaced object; a thing once read. The reader is willing to suspend disbelief and accept the existence of a dragon fighting in the foothills of a mystical land, and yet overlooks, often even forgets, the reality of the book in hand which so readily exists. In embracing a temporal experience, Herel's work challenges this convention by demanding that time be spent encountering his books. His work reinstates the tangible qualities of the book. To learn takes time, and to look through one of Herel's books, one must make the effort to embrace time; relish it.<sup>261</sup>

Arguing an experiential method of interpreting Herel's work has its issues. Analysing a work of art with a personal voice results in a subjective study. Each person who encounters Herel's books may have an entirely different experience. In this sense, there is no single answer.<sup>262</sup> While a vast array of interpretive possibilities should be celebrated, this volume of interpretation, each comment as valuable as the last, makes the communication and arrangement of research difficult. E. D. Hirsch writes of the danger of 'self-confirmability', in which a researcher becomes trapped within their own interpretation.<sup>263</sup> This demonstrates why it is necessary for the first person to be adapted in academic writing, thus providing informed examples of such interpretation from learned individuals. A further problem resides in the inadequacy of language itself. Stephen Harold Riggins makes mention of language, especially in traditional art historical discourse, as:

...the chief determinant in our conceptualization of the world...It is not unrelated fact that the 'practice' of art history...has laid methodological emphasis upon the written document...The idea of the work of art itself as the essential document is often submerged in a preoccupation with texts surrounding the production and reception of art works.<sup>264</sup>

This previous focus upon the scholarly written document as validating a work of art makes it difficult to break the mould using a more subjective tone. Again, the adaptation of an academically informed emotive voice by art historians and curators alike would contribute to the validation of writing on the personal experience of art. Subjective commentary has historically been dismissed as unscientific or unscholarly, yet Herel's books call for this

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<sup>261</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 237.

<sup>262</sup> As Derek Matravers writes: "a representation is removed from reality". Derek Matravers, *Art and Emotion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>263</sup> E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 164.

<sup>264</sup> Stephen Harold Riggins, *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 338.



mode of engagement.<sup>265</sup> The experience of the encounter is therefore a valid, and necessary, model for analysis.

Using the experience of the encounter to engage with Herel's work is a special case for first person analysis. The most difficult of the obstacles facing the incorporation of the encounter into visual analysis is the general aversion towards first person analysis in art historical writing. The use of the first person in art history, and indeed the greater humanities, is infrequent.<sup>266</sup> When one acts against this tradition and puts oneself at the centre of analysis, a more emotive interpretation takes place. This is somewhat encouraged, or at the very least acknowledged, in more literary-based studies. Introducing a collection of essays describing encounters with an artist or art figure, Kai Erikson writes:

In the very real sense...an encounter is an event in the life of the person writing rather than an event in the life of the person being written about. It has its location, as it were, in the landscape of the writer's own life. So it should be no surprise that the writers of these pieces so often place themselves at or near the centre of the scenes they are describing.<sup>267</sup>

Such commentary acknowledges the unavoidable presence of self during interpretation. The interaction at its most basic is one between the viewer and the object. When exploring art objects, priority is typically given to formal and iconographical analysis. This is insufficient for analysing Herel's work.

Herel's books demand the subjective reading denied by isolating oneself from emotive interpretation. His work cannot be thoroughly analysed without engaging with the experience. There is a heightened emphasis upon the viewer as they become increasingly self-conscious of their handling the book. Rather than merely observing the textures of a painting or the soft forms of a textile at a distance, the book as medium allows for a concrete, tangible encounter. If each of Herel's books can be argued as sensual objects with a social biography, surely one can apply Erikson's emotional approach to the discussion of

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<sup>265</sup> Elkins writes on the perceived need for distance in art historical writing: "art historical writing is strange, and interesting partly because of that strangeness: it is infused with curious qualities, with stifled confessional eloquence, a sometimes fevered desire to capture art objects in words, and an unrequited love for science and its dryness".

James Elkins, *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), xi.

<sup>266</sup> Seminal historical figures in the writing of art history such as Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) and Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) established a formal tone that reads objectively. See:

Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *History of the Art of Antiquity*, trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Santa Monica CA: Getty Trust Publications, 2006).

<sup>267</sup> Kai Erikson, *Encounters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), xi.

the artist's book.<sup>268</sup> Writing about art objects should continue to incorporate past interpretive methodologies, but also include a new engagement with the additional physicality, sense of 'body', and emphasis upon the felt presence of an object.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a continuing source of inspiration for Herel, supports the importance of emotion in the humanisation and development of society. The philosopher was fascinated by, preoccupied with, the presence of love in interactions:

Only union through love and in love (using the word love in its widest and most real sense of 'mutual internal affinity'), because it brings individuals together, not superficially and tangentially but centre to centre, can physically possess the property of not merely differentiating but also personalising the elements which comprise it...Mankind will only find and shape itself if men can learn to love one another in the very act of drawing together.<sup>269</sup>

De Chardin supports the need for an acknowledgement of the power of emotion during interactions—between people, as the philosopher is referencing, but also extended by this research to interactions between people and objects. De Chardin's statement is romantic, but the foundational idea of the presence of emotion in interaction substantiates the need to express the powerful encounter of Herel's work. When studying an artist's work, de Chardin argues: "I would say...there is less difference than people think between research and adoration". Adoration is innately subjective, defined both as 'deep love and respect' or the act of worship or veneration, and this subjective intimacy should be acknowledged in academic analysis.<sup>270</sup> The intimate, personal interaction the viewer has with Herel's work requires an equally sensitive vocabulary with which to discuss it. It is a matter of finding the balance between the overemotional and emotionless detachment, which the following experiential experiments will demonstrate.

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<sup>268</sup> In his text *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-century Art*, Adrian Randolph writes of touch as challenging the assumption that all artworks require a written analysis in order to unlock meaning: "this is useful, for it dislodges ingrained iconological habits whereby art objects come to us with textual contents awaiting analytical unlocking. Instead, analysis becomes more processual, with experienced objects merging with our beholding and culturally-embedded bodies..."<sup>268</sup>

Note the use of words such as 'experienced' and 'bodies'. Randolph's experiential analysis challenges traditional methods of formal analysis.

Adrian Randolph, *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-century Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 15.

<sup>269</sup> J. Chetany, *The Future of Man: According to Teilhard de Chardin and Aurobindo Chose* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers & Distributors, 1978), 244-245.

<sup>270</sup> "Adoration," *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/adoration>.

For Jorge Luis Borges, another of the key figures in Herel's pantheon of influences, the act of interpretation is inherently subjective.<sup>271</sup> To encounter one of Herel's works is to rediscover the qualities of the book and to reassess one's role as reader and viewer. Rather than absorbing concrete information in a habitual manner, the artist's book exposes the need for the viewer to become involved, both physically handling the work and generating meaning from what is often ambiguous imagery and text. The interpreter of the artist's book needs to consciously apply a subjective lens to make meaning from the material in hand, adopting Borges' perspective: "I know for a fact that we *feel* the beauty of a poem before we even begin to think of a meaning".<sup>272</sup> To not engage with the intimacy of the artist's book, an object that encourages the viewer to literally feel it, is to deny a significant portion of its meaning. Borges writes of the danger of distance:

Whenever I dipped into books of aesthetics, I have had an uncomfortable feeling that I was reading the works of astronomers who never looked at the stars. I mean that they were writing about poetry as if poetry were a task, and not what it really is: a passion and joy.<sup>273</sup>

Indeed to disengage from emotive interpretation is to not only deny the value of the encounter but to also distance oneself from the opportunity to reflect the personal act of creating the book with subjective interpretation. As one cannot imagine the act of making to be devoid of all feeling, one should not impose such restrictions upon their study, instead incorporating an empirical attitude into analysis. Herel's books, in their demand for temporal and experiential engagement, argue the importance of the academic 'I'—they make a strong case for the academic first person.

### *Slow Looking and Repeated Viewing*

I travelled to Herel's house in Melbourne to meet the artist for the first time. After a lengthy conversation, he offered to bring out some of his books. They were stacked on the dining room table in front of me. I carefully worked my way through each one, wishing I had more time. Yet, as the conversation had been halted due to my looking, I felt the need to apologise for being too slow with each work. Herel responded: "[it is] even better if it is slow".<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> The author is one Herel has drawn upon for several works, including *Borges Sequel* (1982), and *I, I am Blind Man* (1999).

<sup>272</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>274</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

Encountering Herel's work is a temporal experience. Slow looking, the process championed by Jennifer Roberts, enhances this temporal experience.<sup>275</sup> When one practices slow looking, they slow the tempo of their viewing by engaging with a work over a sustained, often uncomfortably long, sitting.<sup>276</sup> This method is particularly productive when applied to the book as art object, as the very act of making one's way through a book, the presence of multiple prints and portions of text, demands time. The artist's book does not expose its entire self at first glance. Roberts encourages the nuanced perspective granted by engaging with an object for an extended period, proposing that though an object may be viewed readily, this does not mean understanding is instantaneous.<sup>277</sup> The inherent qualities of an art object are easily forgotten when one spends only enough time to have 'seen' it, to have ticked a box to feel an immediate sense of accomplishment.<sup>278</sup>

Herel's works do not allow for such an instantaneous viewing when encountered in their entirety. Their contents are not immediately accessible, instead requiring the viewer to take time to interpret meaning. Combined, slow looking, repeated viewing, and touch feed into each other to form an experience vastly different from viewing just one double page spread behind glass. They challenge the interpretation of an object through mere 'habituation', an obstacle in acknowledging "the active contribution of the thing itself to the meaning process".<sup>279</sup> The inclusion of temporal analysis into the interpretation of Herel's work reinstates the essential physicality of the artist's book.

Introducing slow looking to Herel's work exposes several larger, metaphysical questions. These involve matters of time and perceived truth—an interrogation of reality. Much like the conventional book, the phenomenon of time is an everyday presence often overlooked. Introducing it into the criticism of Herel's work suggests a tangible response to the questioning of whether one can be aware of experiencing time. The artist actively draws on the phenomenon as part of the process of experiencing his work, as one is aware of the effect of time on the book, and the book on time. While it is easy to spend a long time with one of Herel's artist's books, this time does not feel lost. It is not slippery. Instead, each

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<sup>275</sup> Jennifer L. Roberts, "The Power of Patience," *Harvard Magazine* (November-December 2013): <http://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience>.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Roberts states: "what this exercise shows students is that just because you have looked at something doesn't mean that you have seen it. Just because something is available instantly to vision does not mean that it is available instantly to consciousness".

Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 43.

In *Under the Sign of Saturn*, Susan Sontag suggests "thinking, writing are ultimately questions of stamina". Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 130.

<sup>279</sup> Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, op cit., 43, 44.

minute is emphasised as the viewer becomes aware of turning each page, how each page engages (not necessarily relating) to the last, and the subtle differences between what is often the same image re-printed with incremental changes. Herel's work requires the viewer to simultaneously examine the work in hand and their manner of engaging with it.

One method of undertaking a temporal analysis of Herel's work is to stay with a single book for an extended session.<sup>280</sup> Rather than quickly flicking through each page to generate a precursory, general understanding of the book, one instead stops on each page for a longer period. The viewer controls the pace of experience, reclaims the pace of experiencing the book from conventional reading habits. Slowing down the tempo creates what feels like a self-indulgent reading rhythm, providing the viewer the opportunity to note new details and analyse individual pages rather than the entire object. This practice is difficult and uncomfortable, and heightens feelings of aberrance by making the viewer aware of, and required to change, their complacent habits, challenging them to avoid habitual interpretive paths. As one might self-impose a return from skim reading to reading, they can return from 'skim viewing' to viewing. An experiment with an extended three-hour viewing of the work *Pano se Mia Cheimoniatike Achina = On a Ray of Winter Sun* (1988) demonstrates the value of applying slow looking to analyse Herel's artists' books, and the subsequent necessity of a simultaneously scholarly and subjective tone.

I argue that to partake in an experiment of slow looking is to undertake fieldwork, and the observations noted during such fieldwork are a new type of art historical field note. These notes serve to demonstrate the validity of slow looking as a means to productively incorporate the subjective viewer into interpretation, rather than remove them. The field notes resulting from a slow looking experiment with *Pano* reveal that this method facilitates an interpretation of the aberrant object that exposes the artist's book as remarkably complex. By slowing down the pace of viewing, I was able to focus on the smaller details that collectively create this complexity, making aberrance not an obstacle but a doorway into multifaceted interpretation. Time gifted me the ability to work through details in an orderly manner and avoid feeling overwhelmed. The aberrant artist's book is a site of interpretive experimentation and possibility, not esoteric roadblocks.

Reflecting upon the field notes taken while interacting with *Pano* is necessary as it explicitly demonstrates the validity and original results of slow looking. By structuring the application of the method as an experiment, the primary material resulting from such study can be

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<sup>280</sup> Roberts asks students to spend a "painfully long time" with a work of art. Jennifer L. Roberts, "The Power of Patience," *Harvard Magazine* (November-December 2013): <http://harvardmagazine.com/2013/11/the-power-of-patience>.

analysed in a scholarly manner. Without this material, it would be difficult to clearly demonstrate the fruitful innovation slow looking brings to the analysis of the artist's book. The inclusion of field notes and reflection upon their observations exposes the variety of ideas slow looking facilitates.

*Field Notes: Slow Looking*

The librarian has taken the information slip out of the folder, so I do not have the standard 'artwork details' I am used to beginning with—title, date, etc. How influential are these upon my interpretation of a work? I pull the book out of its conservational box. First touch. Smooth. The title is in another language—Greek. I try to read it phonetically: "llanq mia xeimqniatikh axтина". The sounds are sharp, as are the letters. They are all capitalised, pointy except for the particularly rounded Ω. The front cover is a map (Fig. 1a). The grids make it look like a mathematics exercise book. It can be a whole image or a grid of four by five smaller images. The grid looks as though it has been laid on top—layers. There are many small arrows, I presume indicating mountains. These mountains, however, don't have direction—perhaps this is a map of the sea? Why have a map of the sea? The idea of a map seems to me to be so closely tied to landmass, to land—to Earth. Some of these arrows are broken lines. What does this signify? Herel has given me a map without a key; the librarian has given me a book without an information slip.

The numbers written on the grid lines are sideways. Compared to the title, the direction of reading is challenged. How do we know which way is the correct one? Is there a correct one? How do we distinguish direction? Geometric lines are juxtaposed against hazy, ambiguous shapes. A swell? This static object, its first page not yet turned, already projects a great sense of movement. These waves look like clouds, or like the layered feathers on the tail of a bird. The page looks marbled. Maybe this is indeed a map of land—unremarkable, middle-of-the-country land. Printed 'sideways' in a tiny label: 'Scattered scrub'. Can something scattered be pinpointed to one place?

The first double page spread is largely blank (Fig. 1b). There is a delta symbol and apostrophe printed bottom middle: 'Δ'. Following the blue map, this looks somewhat like a floating island. It is not actually in the middle of the page, instead hovering slightly to the left. Turning the smooth paper and soft deckled edge, it is hard to tell if the pages are white or off-white. The library lighting makes it hard to distinguish. I look at my skin to determine if the lighting is natural. I am using my body to understand the book, using my body as a point of reference. The text is in Greek again (Fig. 1c). This lettering appears softer than the title page. It looks like cursive that has been separated. The letters reach out

to each other. The next print opposite offers no clear answers. It too is both geometric and curvaceous—another floating landmass. How can land, something we know to be so present and heavy, how can land then float? How do islands and icebergs float? It is movement of the (perceived) unmoveable. The mass is covered in a fine grid—small squares. Around it, emanating from it, dance small energetic lines (Fig. 1d). They are dense in some areas, creating a kind of shadow. There are a couple of oceanic forms hovering on the outskirts—starfish and swirling conch shells. Though these are more concrete forms, the lines that compose them are shaky. I think of Herel etching these lines, his hand quivering—a result of concentration, a result of age, or the result of an overworked hand? Each small line looks like a hair or tiny symbol. Together they create a crowd of tiny letterforms, scattered in every direction.

Looking across the room and out a window, I let the lumping treetops and mountain in the distance turn into more Herel-like ambiguous forms. The more I stare at this book, the more it becomes imprinted into my eyes and is layered over everything I look at, like a translucent piece of tracing paper.

A visual surprise follows the sharp geometry of previous pages—a double page print (Fig. 1e). The top edges of the print look like crashing sea foam. The entire image is teal, alongside a dull mint colour. The white of the page becomes another part of the colour palette, as it speckles its way through the greens. There is a feeling of a ‘splash’. I think of putting my face in the ocean and opening my eyes, a fast paced, swirling madness of salt and sand and ambiguous masses, all being pulled by different swells—bubbles and streaks of sand and the possibility of being surrounded by strange creatures. I think of the idea of The Unknown and possible iterations—the Moving Unknown, the Busy Unknown, the Active Unknown. Or perhaps this is an image of a campfire site, flames licking at the bottom, a speckled galaxy above. Greek script faintly swirls around the middle of the page—are these floating words a visual manifestation of stories told around the fire? A book is a physical manifestation of floating words—thoughts, spoken stories, and ideas. It usually promises us clarity, though, the clear communication of a message. Here, the script swirls out of sight, caught in a breeze, uninterested in revealing all of itself to us.

Later text changes back over to English. I quickly flick forward; I am hungry for more. Having spent extended time with the pages thus far; I chastise myself for my greed. The print features a whirl-pooling circle (Fig. 1f). Encircled many times over, the lines are dark and shadowed. What was Herel thinking of as he continuously retraced this shape? Entering, or exiting, the shapes are sharper forms—arrows, numbers, and an upside-down

crucifix. Small dancing letters crowd around the outside, as if egging the hungry whirl on, or hovering close as if drawn by a magnetic field. These ambiguous dancing letters ironically ground the image. They act as a sort of shading device, creating a sense of the floor. The more I stare into the whirlpool, the less sure I am of the travelling forms. They are not making themselves any clearer with time or concentration. The grids, however, reveal themselves to be moving in different directions. They twist and overlap each other. Grids are supposed to be grounded, equal, and certain, yet these are being warped within the vortex. These grids distort information. The eye does not know where to look. Again, orientation is brought into question.

Moving on to a blank double page spread, except for 'TV' printed on the left-hand page, which also appears to be floating. Perhaps the more you spend time with an object such as this, the more comfortable you are to allow it to start moving. Books are not normally supposed to move. Herel often speaks of the artist's book as a living creature, engaging with "Growth" and "Decay".<sup>281</sup> This one swells about in unpredictable circles, like a football dropped in the surf. It is out of reach and in your hand at the same time. The left side of the previous print repeated, this time on translucent paper, which feels how the print looks—soft, malleable, light, and textured (Fig. 1g). I can see even more of the scratches and marking. The print looks battered—a battered print in a carefully handled book. On the opposite page: ON A RAY OF WINTER SUN. Such pointy, loud lettering, mirroring the Greek title, for what must surely be a soft, comforting phenomenon. The more time I spend with this work, the more I realise that there are different visual elements to consider—printed image, text, the visual of my environment, of my own body in relation to the book (in collaboration with the book?). I think of how the body might influence the viewing of a book—what the hand accidentally obscures as I turn a page. Does the scale of my body effect the experience?

On the next double page spread rests the Greek translation (Fig. 1h). This lettering is beautifully decorative, a visual kind of writing. Does English appear this way to those who are not familiar with it? The folded print on this thin page hugs the papers contained within it. It wraps itself around the thicker pages within, the fine protecting the solid. Finally, some concrete details: 'GIORGOS SEFERIS'. Copying out the Greek text, I find myself concentrating on letters I am already familiar with more than usual—in this context, they become unfamiliar. In this context, the book becomes unfamiliar.

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<sup>281</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, April 13, 2017.



Familiar/unfamiliar—roots in *familia*, servants of a household, from *famulus*, a servant or slave. This is particularly significant to the idea of the book, usually subjected to the will of the reader. To turn each page carefully I must rub my thumb along the soft texture of the deckle edge. I have forgotten the name of the small section of details at the back of the book. Again, reflecting my desire to categorise and label.

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Critically analysing these field notes, taken during a slow looking exercise with *Pano se Mia Cheimoniatike Ahtina* = *On a Ray of Winter Sun*, demonstrates the value of applying temporal analysis to the artist's book. Slow looking created a space in which I was able to question the influence of conventional, objective interpretation upon analysis. At the very beginning of the exercise, I questioned convention's place in attempting to understand a work, exposing my reliance on being given standard details (title, date, etc.) to initiate interpretation. By not being provided with these details, and having the time to think about the impact of this upon analysis, I was forced to begin my engagement with the artist's book in a manner entirely driven by individual experience. By being closer to the object in an intimate interpretive space, and by achieving an additional layer of intimacy through touch, I was further away from the conventions that dictate that critical engagement is inextricable from distance. By embracing the individual encounter, I was not only able to engage with the physical book in hand, but also to interrogate the phenomenon of interpretation itself.

Knowing that I was to spend an extended period with *Pano* created a space in which I could explore more open-ended ideas related to the work in hand as well as the artist book genre. I felt more comfortable asking questions, and leaving these questions in their original format, rather than attempting to answer them or phrase them as a statement, as might be done in conventional art histories. It is important to note that in the case of temporal analysis, asking questions does not indicate a lack of knowledge, rather an extended engagement with the larger themes of the book. In this instance, I questioned subject matter, perspective, and the presumed responsibilities of language to communicate a clear message. In the case of the aberrant artist's book, this questioning is fundamental as it reflects the ambiguity of such objects—*Pano* does not have a clear subject, perspective or message, and to assume just one approach to these elements would deny the intrinsic ambiguity of Herel's work. By engaging with metaphysical concerns, Herel creates books that do not necessarily have concrete ties to a clear-cut reality. Applying slow looking as a

methodology to the artist's work creates the framework with which to discuss and examine their essential ambiguity.

During my experiment slow looking at *Pano*, I noted using my body as a point of reference. By giving myself enough time to move beyond attempts at conventional understanding, by opening myself as interpreter to the nebulous qualities of the book and its interrogation of interpretation, I began to explore the performative qualities of Herel's work. The emphasis on physicality created a space in which I could consider my role in activating the book in hand. Rather than avoiding the individual interpreter and subjective experience, the intimacy achieved through spending time with *Pano* encouraged an examination of the subjective encounter.

These field notes demonstrate that using slow looking to engage with the Herel's work results in a tangible documentation of the rhythms of viewing and interpretation emphasised by the physicality of the artist's book. The notes document both my physical and conceptual movement through *Pano*, and act as evidence of both the presence and impact of rhythm and pace during interpretation. Demonstrated by my movement from double page spread to double page spread, to looking out the window at the landscape and to considering the library environment around me, to experience the artist's book is to engage with the book as art object over a period of time. Slow looking provides a way to both document and critically engage with this temporal experience.

It is important to acknowledge that the application of slow looking, indeed temporal methodologies in general, does not require the interpreter to disengage with art historical tradition and formal analysis. During the extended viewing period outlined above, I noted the impact of line, perspective and colour. Often, formal qualities of the page were used as starting points for larger questioning. Not only did these elements engage directly with my eye, but with time I was also able to examine how they interacted with and informed each other. I noted the formation of lines on the page into a grid, and the mathematical, scientific connotations of this composition. I noted perspectival disparity between vertically marked numbers written in the opposite direction to the printed title. From this, I was led to question how viewers in general know from which direction to approach a work, or how they can discern if a most appropriate approach exists. This extended examination of formal qualities was facilitated by a slower viewing tempo, and cements the importance of the subjective viewer when interpreting the artist's book. Rather than simply listing visual elements and their immediate, direct impact on the page, I was able to incorporate them into a larger interrogation of reception.

A notable observation articulated in the *Pano* field notes is that I was allowing the object to start moving. This note is relevant to Herel's attitude of the artist's book as a living creature, and his preoccupation with themes of growth and decay.<sup>282</sup> It can also be identified as a precursor to my later argument of the artist's book as exquisite corpse.<sup>283</sup> This observation is particularly significant in this instance, because to generate such an abstract thought certainly relies on time. These field notes are evidence that slow looking bestows upon the viewer a meaningful way to use time as a method of engaging with the nebulous, unclear, and aberrant concepts at the heart of Herel's work. There are no quick, clear answers here—Herel's work consciously denies immediate understanding. Consequently, and as these notes demonstrate, it is necessary to develop a methodology that does not attempt to force such an immediate, clear outcome. An extended interpretive period is necessary to understand Herel's work. The artist's book rests dormant until the viewer activates it, makes it move, by turning pages. I required time to observe and engage with the movements of the book.

Spending an extended period of time with *Pano* brought to light considerations of the book's formal qualities, physical qualities, and larger thematic references. Formally, it became evident that the book encouraged a questioning of the visual impact of language and letters, of the movement of the eye across and through the work, the impact of composition on the sense of direction, and the connotations evoked by line.<sup>284</sup> Physically, the book interrogated the impact of touch, using the body as a point of interpretive reference, and questioned the influence environment has upon the artist's book and the artist's book upon environment.

Applying slow looking to the analysis of *Pano* provided the time to extend these smaller formal and physical qualities and develop them into key larger ideas that informed this research—for example Herel's artist book practice and its relationship with cartography, and the idea of a map without a key as an analogy for the artist's book's lack of concrete interpretive method.<sup>285</sup> The development of these ideas was specifically made possible through slow looking. It is important to note that the ideas generated during this experimentation were the inspiration for the larger focuses of this dissertation.

This kind of extended phenomenological approach to object analysis can be related to de Chardin's writing on the development of society. De Chardin celebrated the advancement

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<sup>282</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, April 13, 2017.

<sup>283</sup> The artist's book as exquisite corpse will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.

<sup>284</sup> The aesthetic qualities of language and text in Herel's work is the focus of Chapter Four.

<sup>285</sup> The relationship between Herel's work and cartography is the focus of Chapter Five.

of mankind.<sup>286</sup> In fact, the philosopher saw the increasing complexities of humankind as leading “up the path of progress to higher levels of hominisation”.<sup>287</sup> He believed that to advance was to become more human. This path would eventually lead to an end state at which the ‘Omega Point’ (de Chardin’s central point of existence, the core of the universe and of meaning) was reached.<sup>288</sup> At the same time, however, the philosopher wrote of ‘modern disquiet’, in which people were thrown off balance when confronted with a new, busier environment.<sup>289</sup> This notion of ‘modern disquiet’ is inextricably tied to Herel’s practice, as the artist pointedly counterpoises fast-paced contemporary rhythms with his temporal, experiential work.

Herel speaks of contemporary society as having an “instantaneous attitude”.<sup>290</sup> He is creating during an ‘age of immediacy’, of which he is conscious but actively contradicts. The artist notes the general focus placed upon constant exhibition as demonstrative of progress, choosing instead to take many years to finish a book.<sup>291</sup> Commenting upon the conscious decision to relish the time taken to produce a work, the artist exclaims: “thank God it...gives you time to think about and go through things, because we need time”.<sup>292</sup> The temporal interpretation of Herel’s practice is subsequently relevant to the artist’s own ethos. By incorporating the temporal into analysis, the viewer achieves a sense of interiority that mirrors the artist’s own during the act of creation.

Herel believes that computers have greatly contributed to the perceived necessity of a shorter time span in undertaking projects—a sense of needing things now.<sup>293</sup> This is in contrast with past artists who, despite ironically creating during avant-garde movements and celebrating the modern, still seemed to work in what the artist refers to as a “longer time span”.<sup>294</sup> Herel recalls time spent in the State Library of Victoria, researching the notebooks of Paul Valéry:

...they were organised in such a way that it was possible to see his various thoughts on various topics—philosophy, literature, poetry, whatever—from his last year.

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<sup>286</sup> Julian Huxley, “Introduction,” in *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), 17.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Julian Huxley, “Introduction,” in *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), 18.

<sup>289</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), 227.

<sup>290</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

And there was one which was very simply: “posterity is dead”. It was written in ’45, so it was one of his last thoughts...<sup>295</sup>

Valéry suggests posterity has died—in this context, perhaps as a result of a need for instantaneous gratification. If one finds instant gratification in an object, perhaps that object only exists in the present moment, and does not have a lasting presence or a future. Herel’s work reinstates a consideration of posterity into contemporary life. Artists’ books encourage the acknowledgement of their respective journeys, their futures as objects and the future viewers they will interact with. To be made aware of the journey of the book object slows down interpretation, making the current viewer one of many. In this ‘age of immediacy’, Herel’s work calls for the viewer to consciously not apply the rhythms of fast-paced, virtual scrolling to the interpretation of the book.<sup>296</sup> Codex page and Internet page are fundamentally different, and the artist’s book requires a deliberate application of a slower interpretive rhythm.

Harold Rosenberg writes of the ‘dynamism’ of contemporary art:

Movement in art is thus an aspect of the trend that has been converting the art object into the art event. In becoming active, whether physically or mechanically, art takes on the dynamism of the contemporary world and accommodates itself to radical characteristics of the modern sensibility.<sup>297</sup>

Art has become busier in reflecting the modern, busy sensibility under which circumstances it arises. Herel’s work counters this—instead of creating books that are over-stimulating and fast moving art ‘events’, he purposefully works to create an encounter slowed down by the act of looking. His work transforms event into experience.<sup>298</sup> By creating works that demand a process of slow looking, Herel encourages the reinstatement of a state of quiet.<sup>299</sup> Unlike other artists who embrace a total re-contextualisation of the book as art object, in keeping with the traditional sensibilities of the book making process, Herel

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>297</sup> Harold Rosenberg, *Art & Other Serious Matters* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 13.

<sup>298</sup> Rosenberg notes there are artists working in the face of the overactive artwork, commenting: “confronted by the assault of hyperactive art, some artists have adopted a strategy of monastic withdrawal. The state of quiet is increasingly unattainable in contemporary experience, be it the most meditative”. Ibid., 16.

<sup>299</sup> Brad Freeman writes that the book is an ‘undeniably time-based medium’.

Brad Freeman, “Artist/Author: Contemporary Artists’ Books,” *Journal of Artists’ Books* 11 (1999): 27.

instigates a 'slowing down' of communication with his presentation of a familiar form with unfamiliar contents.<sup>300</sup>

Though de Chardin did not live to experience contemporary technological culture, his theories can be examined in relation to Herel's dissatisfaction with immediacy. Perhaps this age of instant gratification is the result of man in overdrive, a process de Chardin celebrated at its foundation but did not live to see in modern context. Herel's work argues this previously celebrated human evolution has distracted the ways in which art is experienced.<sup>301</sup> Adopting de Chardin's terminology, one questions whether this development has become so one-sided it is now impossible to reach the 'Omega Point'. In having already used a negatively inclined term such as 'disquiet', the philosopher might be overwhelmed with humankind's development in overdrive if witnessing modern society's current state. De Chardin lived during a time of awe-inspiring and formative technological advancements such as the telephone, fast cars and black and white television. Technologies such as these arguably began as a quest for more knowledge, for experimentation. However, in Herel's contemporary age of immediacy, this has transformed into ironically accessing information so readily it detrimentally eliminates the time to immerse oneself in learning. The hypothetical Orwellian projection of this trend is a future in which not only is time removed from the interpretation of art but from the artist himself. Herel's work questions whether society has stopped giving itself enough time to think. In the face of busy technology and quick access, Herel's books advocate for a revolution towards the quiet moment.

Another temporal method applicable to the analysis of the artist's book is repeated viewing. This approach is championed by T.J. Clark in his book *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (2006). The text contains diary-like entries documenting the writer's revisiting of Nicolas Poussin's *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (c. 1648) and *Landscape with a Calm* (1650-1651) in the Getty Museum, Los Angeles.<sup>302</sup> Clark viewed the two paintings, which hung in the same room in the Museum, day after day, and kept a journal noting his different thoughts during each sitting. He writes:

But astonishing things happen if one gives oneself over to the process of seeing again and again: aspect after aspect of the picture seems to surface, what is salient

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<sup>300</sup> Jae Rossman, "Reading Outside the Lines: Paratextual Analysis and Artists' Books," *Journal of Artists' Books* 23 (2008): 41.

<sup>301</sup> Sontag writes in a similar vein of the current "post-political, electronically connected cosmopolis..." Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will* (Picador: New York, 1969), 15.

<sup>302</sup> T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

and what incidental alter bewilderingly from day to day, the larger order of the depiction breaks up, recrystallises, fragments again, persists like an afterimage.<sup>303</sup>

Not only did Clark begin to notice different nuances the longer he spent looking at the Poussin paintings, but his own voice also began to filter into his writing. He complains of the conditions in which he is looking:

Too many of the diary entries, particularly in the first weeks, get into gear with a certain amount of fussing over light conditions, outside atmospherics, and how much or how little of the painting I could see...But lightness and darkness have to be part of my story.<sup>304</sup>

Note the use of ‘my story’—engaging with Poussin’s work in this temporal manner has become a part of Clark’s personal history, or the history he is creating by writing the book.

The binary of art and literature that characterises Herel’s work does present the opportunity to reference more literary interpretations of art. Like Clark, poet Mark Doty expresses a viewing of seventeenth century Dutch still life that is subjectively experiential.<sup>305</sup> His reference to physical sensations when viewing a work of art is particularly relevant to the physicality of Herel’s work; his writing articulates a poetic space created between work and viewer.<sup>306</sup> Doty’s language proves the merit of creativity in the interpretation of art—a creativity that Herel’s work encourages through the nature of its highly personal interaction with the viewer. Take, for example, the idea that a work of art is not only manifested by a physical object but also the atmosphere its interpretation creates:

...everything here has been transformed into feeling, as if by looking very hard at an object it suddenly comes that much closer to some realm where it isn’t a thing at all but something just on the edge of dissolving. Into what?<sup>307</sup>

The analysis of an art object can evidently be approached in a manner that engages with a larger poetic interaction. The language of such an interpretation should be unrestricted to

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>305</sup> Mark Doty, *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

<sup>306</sup> Doty too is an advocate of spending extended periods of time with a single work of art, identifying the process as revealing the personal—the essence of art: “what memory does, what long habitation does, Cavafy proposes, is art—or at least it does exactly what art does, which is to take the world within us and somehow make it ours, through description, through memory, through the act of saying the world, saying (or painting!) how we see”. Here, Doty is referring to Constantine P. Cavafy’s (1863-1933) 1929 poem *In the Same Space*, which describes the process of being in the same place as turning objects into feelings.

Ibid., 64.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 6.

match the poeticism of this encounter. Herel's art/literature dichotomy should be mirrored with an informed, experiential analysis.

Like slow looking, repeated viewing is an exercise in duration. The primary difference is that in this case, the viewer has the opportunity to leave and later return to the work. In this sense, repeated viewing creates a further extended interpretive experience—one leaves the work and rests knowing they will interact with it for the foreseeable future. Engaging with Herel's books in this repetitive way, the viewer incorporates the work into their day-to-day life. In doing so, interpreting the object can extend beyond the one-off experience and links can be made between the artist's book and larger ideas of life, the body, and creative process. The book is not just an object observed in the present moment, instead introduced into day-to-day consciousness. Employing this temporal methodology to interpret *The Distant Present: Three Poems from the Book of Epigrams* (2011) demonstrates the intimate and specific analysis it facilitates. With Clark as example, such an exploration can justifiably employ the first person and take the form of field notes. Like the slow looking example above, undertaking a repeated viewing exercise can be approached as an experiment, with the resulting notes analysed as primary evidence.

#### *Field Notes: Repeated Viewing*

##### *Day One*

Opening the protective sleeve is like opening a present, unfolding the four flaps sealed with loud Velcro. The sleeve emphasises the work's shape, makes it difficult to extract— I am very aware of my hands. Am I doing this wrong? I can see myself in the reflection of the library booth's glass: uncertain, flushed. Alongside the book there are two pieces of paper kept in a slippery, clear sleeve. I look at the information first. I subconsciously crave guidance.

The first print is a rich, bright orange (Fig. 2a). It is made up of many different flecks that resemble small hairs. The whole page is coloured with various intensities of the hue. Making out trees, I believe it is a landscape scene. I see clouds, and perhaps the flecks are distant bird silhouettes. There are shadows at the foot of the print but no clear grounding otherwise. Are these smudges intentional? What would it mean if they were not?

The page is so very orange. I cannot think of anything this richly saturated in everyday life to refer to when describing the image to others. Do I need to describe this image to others? What compels me to do so? Photographs are not doing the print justice, or anything close



to resembling justice. Such is the forceful nature of such a humble object in making the viewer come to it. You must see it, touch it, and sense it for yourself.

#### *Day Two*

There is a sharp contrast between the curvaceous Greek handwriting and the square page (Fig. 2b). Some of the text looks photocopied, or as though it is wearing off. This layering creates a feeling of a palimpsest. Herel's work questions the line between book and palimpsest, printed page and changing manuscript. The book and the palimpsest are one.

Though there is a clear plate-mark and some colour visible on the other side of the page, viewing a double page spread is viewing a lot of negative space (Fig. 2c). The text seems to be floating amongst it, the page number a little lost buoy. Is negative space as much part of the work as that which is filled with image and text? Not just the leftover? Just because something is not obviously present does not mean it is not there.

#### *Day Three*

The Manila cover reminds me of an office folder filled with tedious paperwork, once read and then discarded in a dusty Filofax.

The page reads: TO THE READER. Am I a reader or a viewer? Can Herel or Tsaloumas make that decision for me; force me to interpret a particular way? Can they control that? As I instinctively move to turn the page at the top right corner, I am touching the outline of the print. It shoots up and into my finger in a direct line.

The librarians are displeased today—apparently, I am not in the correct workspace. Today I am much more aware of their watching me, and wonder how this will impact my interpretation. Everything feels less intimate and more exposed.

#### *Day Four*

This book is a collaboration between Australian Galleries and Uncollected Works Press. What are the practicalities of such an arrangement? Does the Gallery just provide funding, or does it dictate specific criteria? Philip Grundy has translated the text—how does that process work? Is it artist or writer who organises translation? How does Herel choose a translator? How might different translators have chosen to present the text?

Today I am focussed on the other people involved in the production of Herel's work. Perhaps I have become too focussed on the artist, and have overlooked others. Who are the other contributors to Herel's practice?

The writer of this text is Dimitris Tsaloumas. How does a collaboration such as this work? Does an author have to agree to be included, and what happens if they do not? Does Herel choose authors more frequently than they ask for him? How many artists and writers does he have asking to collaborate at any given time? How much do the art and literature communities overlap? This book questions the line between collaboration, quotation, and appropriation.

Following this musing on author/artist relationship, would Herel be able to describe the moment he realises the need to use a particular passage? Is it anything like how I feel when I look at one of his works for the first time? What are the common themes he finds himself attached to? Is there anything for which he will not compromise?

#### *Day Five*

I am seated in front of the same librarians as two days ago, making me feel somewhat unwelcome.

I am still left not knowing what the object means as a whole. Does it mean something in particular? Does it have to? The landscape looks harsh to me today. I've been looking at other Herel works this morning and they have all been thematically dark. The clouds/treetops look like coagulated blood stains. Coagulated is a suitable word for the spots. They look as though, like ink, they are bleeding into the paper, seeping in and blotching outwards. I am thinking of natural disasters. There seems to be a heat emanating off the trees. The orange begins intensely saturated and gradually becomes lighter travelling up the print. I imagine resting up in the clean air and looking down. I imagine what it would feel like to try and breathe amongst the smoke—thick and heavy. I think I imagine this situation because of the asthma attacks I had as a child. It is a scary thing, to find it difficult to breathe.

Text reads "TO THE READER": relief, clear writing, I am saved, like a cold glass of water. Visual respite.

There is a small dark hair resting on the page. It is not mine, I must not have noticed it yesterday, or perhaps it is a librarian's. Such a small particle, to so loudly remind me of the presence of others.

The black iteration of this print seems mottled, almost like a patch of fungus or disease (Fig. 2d-e). This is not worrying, though, as the negative space around the print and on the other page gives me enough distance—I cannot get dirty. The air up at the top of the print is an unchanging grey. Perhaps this is impending rain, making its way over to provide some relief.

Different words of the poetry are jumping out at me today—exile, deaf, nightmare.

*Finish.*

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A critical reflection of these field notes, taken over a period of five days repeatedly viewing *The Distant Present*, demonstrates the valuable interpretive scope facilitated by applying the temporal methodology of repeated viewing to the artist's book. Importantly, this repetitive method created a structure with which I could challenge myself to engage with a different aspect of the work each session. It provided a clear framework to approach what might initially appear an overwhelmingly complex work. On day one, I questioned how I should approach such an object, whether there is a conventional manner on which to reply, before moving on to examine Herel's use of colour. On day two, I began an analysis of text and composition. The focus of day three was the relationship between the roles of reader and viewer, and included observations of the impact of environment upon interpretation. On day four I focused solely on the role of other people in the production of Herel's work. Finally, on day five I wrote of the evocation of atmosphere and an awareness of the book's individual history—the presence of other viewers and the book's movements over time since first created.

Examining these notes, it is clear that repeatedly returning to the same work resulted in a broad range of observations and questioning. Repeated viewing created a rhythm with which I could engage with the nebulous qualities of the book in hand. If I had interpreted *The Distant Present* over just a single sitting, I arguably would not have been exposed to as many ideas. The methodology provided a pattern that allowed me to relax into the aberrant nature of the work, to feel more comfortable through the presence of some structure that still left me able to ask questions. I was able to focus, have time to be away from the work, and focus again, an exercise that increased my confidence in engaging with the work due to practice. Like slow looking, repeated viewing exposes the rhythms of interpretation.

These field notes highlight the influence of environment upon encountering the artist's book. There were sessions during which I did not note my surroundings at all, and others

in which it clearly influenced my experience of *The Distant Present*. On day three of the experiment I was confronted by several librarians displeased at my choice of desk. Though I was not required to move, I did become increasingly aware of their presence in the room and interest in my work. I noted that the experience felt less intimate due to feeling exposed. Had I not viewed *The Distant Present* on other days, I may not have been able to observe this impact—I would not have had the material to compare the particularities of the session. It is interesting to note that the influence of others particularly impacted my formal analysis of the book on day five. Arguably due to the changed atmosphere, as well as having viewed other works by Herel that day which were overwhelmingly sombre, focus turned to darker qualities of the book. I observed the similarities between ink and blood, ideas of natural disasters and fire, the mottled image resembling fungus or disease. I noted words from the poetry that were seemed particularly pronounced: exile, deaf, nightmare. These notes explicitly demonstrate the influence and implications of environment upon interpretation. Applying repeated viewing to analyse *The Distant Present* provided a wealth of material from which to explore ideas generated by the book and observe the act of interpretation itself. The viewer needs time to engage with and process the complex, aberrant artist's book, and repeated viewing provides a clear methodology with which to do so.

The inclusion of such field notes reveals the phenomenological questioning that arises from a repeated viewing experiment. By allowing myself to write exactly what I was thinking during the experience, the compilation of these daily notes is a tangible, structured timeline documenting the process of interpretation over time. As Clark retrospectively reflects on the progression of his own repetitive note-taking:

Reading over what I had written then, I realized that if the notes were interesting it was primarily as a record of looking taking place and changing through time.<sup>308</sup>

Repetitive viewing is a beneficial methodology in a two-fold manner—in developing ideas about the art object being viewed, but also in reflecting upon the act of interpretation itself. As noted above, repetitive analysis engaged with considerations of the gestures and movements of reading, and a reflection upon the personal connotations of materiality and the larger web of relationships the artist's book represents. Repeated analysis clearly demonstrates the necessity of applying temporal methodologies to engage with Herel's work.

### *Touch*

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<sup>308</sup> T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.

Herel's artists' books also present the argument for touch as a significant interpretive tool. The sensory experience of touch, the act of physical revelation, demands an experiential investigation of the book as art object. It is unfortunate that touch has become lost in standard art historical analysis. Though conservation issues and institutional policies dictate the prohibition of touch in some contexts, it is irrational that the sensation has become almost entirely overlooked in the analysis of the object in art history. This is especially true in the case of Herel's practice, as his work is available in library and personal collections that facilitate touch as part of the encounter. Not only is touch a new method to analyse the artist's book, it is a method necessary to understanding.

The argument Herel's books make for touch as an important interpretive tool can be linked to the writing of filmmaker and artist Jan Švankmajer (1934-). Švankmajer's interest in tactility is particularly appropriate to a new understanding of Herel's work due to his status as a contemporary Czech Surrealist.<sup>309</sup> From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, Švankmajer conducted experiments exploring the relationship between touch and imagination:

The point of my experimentation...is to find out if touch is capable of penetrating (as an independent sense) the realm of art, and to what degree it is able to influence and enrich it.<sup>310</sup>

Such experimentation included asking participants to identify objects hidden in a bag, only using their fingers, and then engage in an automatic verbal response. These results, along with Švankmajer's observations and notes, were compiled into a book, *Touch and Imagination*, with five copies produced in 1983.<sup>311</sup> Relevant to the idea of the aberrant object, Švankmajer noted: "The sense of touch, which we are barely aware of in everyday life, at times of psychic strain becomes hugely amplified".<sup>312</sup> This comment validates the importance of analysing touch to the understanding of Herel's artist book practice—the aberrant object, an object that can be unsettling and jarring as simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, emphasises touch. Both acknowledging and discussing this amplification of touch can greatly impact the way a viewer critically engages with the artist's book.

The application of Švankmajer's approach to touch is further vital to this thesis as it validates the use of experiential interpretation and written responses to the art object. By

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<sup>309</sup> Herel's work will be analysed in relation to concepts from Surrealism in Chapter Three.

<sup>310</sup> Jan Švankmajer, *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art*, ed. Cathryn Vasseleu, trans. Stanley Dalby (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 82.

<sup>311</sup> These books were appropriately tactile objects themselves, covered with sections of rabbit fur and sandpaper.

Cathryn Vasseleu, "Editor's preface," in *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art*, ed. Cathryn Vasseleu, trans. Stanley Dalby (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), xv.

<sup>312</sup> Švankmajer, op cit., xxi-xxii.

asking participants to engage in automatic response, many of the results in *Touch and Imagination* are subjective and poetic, unrestrained by any perceived necessity for academic formality.<sup>313</sup> Švankmajer applied this experiential writing style outside of the experiments, as demonstrated by excerpts included in *Touch and Imagination* from a ‘tactile diary’ the artist kept in the early 1980s, documenting everyday tactile experiences as a way of heightening self-awareness and aiding an “immediate experience of the most banal actions”.<sup>314</sup> This diary engaged with first person analysis, automatic response and a stream-of-consciousness style encouraged by Surrealism. Not only was Švankmajer conducting experiments to analyse the experience of touch in art, he was also creating a foundation from which experimental approaches to experiential writing can justify their place within art historical discourse.

Herel’s work *I, I am a Blind Man: Three Poems* (1999) is an exemplary case study for the necessity of touch when analysing the artist’s book. It contains three poems by Borges exploring the loss of vision. The writer himself suffered from gradual blindness in his fifties, commenting: “Blindness is a confinement, but it is also a liberation, a solitude propitious to invention, a key and an algebra”.<sup>315</sup> Instead of relying on his eyes, the blind man relies on, takes advantage of, his other senses, including touch. The first page of *I, I am a Blind Man* features the Spanish title in bright red (Fig. 3a). Underneath each word is the English translation, however this typeface is invisible, only embossed onto the page. The letters are mere indents, making them difficult to see with the naked eye and creating a sense of expansive negative space. Instead, running my hand over the grooved shapes reveals the words (Fig. 3b). The page raises the provocative question of whether one can read with their hands. In this case, I feel the translation rather than just visually scanning it. This again relates to blindness and the process of reading Braille—finding meaning through touch. A following page sees English in red and Spanish invisible. I search for this invisible word, for meaning, amongst a sea of negative space, in which floats the teasingly obvious scarlet ‘T’. Touch gives these imprinted letters another dimension; they become their own beings with both front and back, extending beyond the two-dimensional page. Interacting with a work that encourages such tactility, this running of fingers over text naturally moves onto a running of fingers over nearby binding. Each individual line of

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<sup>313</sup> Švankmajer’s wife, the celebrated Czech Surrealist Eva Švankmajerová (1940–2005) writes of constricting formality: “the tedious, antiquated, bureaucratic ‘sorting’, ranking of events, of relationships, so futile and dangerous, was meant to purge the mad eroticism of touch; to leave it to the blind. Our judgements, just like the thoughts of our pupils, are censored: ‘No touching!’ We call it education”.

Eva Švankmajerová, “Tactilism,” in *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art*, ed. Cathryn Vasseleu, trans. Stanley Dalby (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), xxiii.

<sup>314</sup> Švankmajer, op cit., 113.

<sup>315</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “The Unending Rose,” in *The Book of Sand* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 101.

string is transformed into a tactile presence. It is given a presence on the page through touch.

Herel's use of dual languages continues throughout the work. The artist has handwritten the Spanish translations of the poetry above the typed English. His lines tilt upwards, reminding me of their freehandedness (Fig. 3c). The use of handwriting creates a sense of the artist's own hand, in his physically putting pen to paper. Though multilingual, Herel does not speak Spanish, which suggests a particularly concentrated touch. I can imagine the increase in attention required to copy out unfamiliar words. The handwritten text is faded, lighter than the typed. Perhaps this individual writing is waning in correlation with the blind man's vision.

The repeated printed image, of an abstracted man's portrait, is monochromatic (Fig. 3d). There is a sense of depth achieved through texture, the abundance of small scratches and bumps that make up his face and neck present a rocky-looking landscape, prime for running my fingers over. Continuing with this geological metaphor, this portrait might be considered a map of the man's face. As the print is repeated it becomes more ambiguous, the artist playing with tone and form (Fig. 3e-f). These prints post the question as to what someone with limited vision can ascertain about a person. And even more so, what someone can ascertain about themselves if this is all they can see of their own face. The plate-mark acts as unforgiving mirror. On the back of these printed pages the plate-mark is visible, creating a rectangular form of its own. This time the paper is raised, in contrast to the previous indentations of letters. Noticing the difference between the two marks the beginnings of the ability to compartmentalise touch, to notice the difference between touched things and to notice the nuances only touching can make us aware of. Again, the artist's presence is at hand, literally, as I feel for myself. The viewer is reminded of the physical, tactile processes of printmaking. Tracing fingers along lumps and bumps is tracing the pressure of the plate, the artist's movements. My hand becomes tied to his in both having worked the same page.

There is one spread in particular which encapsulates this tactile interpretation. Around the middle of the book, I am faced with a raised plate-mark on left paired with imprinted 'Soy' and vibrant 'I am' on the right (Fig. 3g). I can combine the two pages together to create a larger, whole image. Here the artist is making links between touch and being. Herel is offering more to feel than to see. With the accompanying words simply stating 'I am', it can be argued Herel sees himself as inextricably tied to his sense of touch, which is logical considering the movements of printmaking. Here the artist is offering a chance to realise

the possibilities of touch in meaning making. Reiterated by the lack of distinct features in the ambiguous face of the printed man, Herel presents tactility as another way to understand. A blind man touches because he has to. Mirroring Borges' optimism, Herel's work celebrates touching because you can.

The body is a fundamental interpretive tool which one uses to navigate the world on a daily basis. It is "metaphoric to the larger body of the universe", a large contributor to our understanding.<sup>316</sup> Hovering one's hand over the kettle to see if it is still hot, feeling the dust on a dirty object. Touch is not only a safety mechanism, but also one that brings great pleasure. There is an inexplicable joy to holding a soft, furry peach that is just as important as the act of eating it—it is enjoyable not only through its sweetness but also the way in which it fits into a cupped hand. The same can be said for holding Herel's work. By using touch as interpretive tool, the viewer gains another method with which to analyse the aberrant artist's book. Language can only go so far in its descriptions, and a wall label can only do so much in giving context.<sup>317</sup> The word 'experience' itself represents a much larger web of interaction not just limited to vision: it represents not only a mixing of artist and viewer and viewer and collection, but also viewer and object.<sup>318</sup> Such dynamics are very much influential in the interpretation of Herel's work, as the artist himself celebrates his books for their physical presence and tactility.<sup>319</sup>

Touch is an act of intimacy, an intimate act.<sup>320</sup> Herel's work is sensual in the meeting of hand to object—to smooth paper and to marked page and to lumpy binding. To hold one of Herel's works in hand is to embrace coprophiliac pleasure, not in the primary Freudian sense but through its extended associations with melancholy and obsession.<sup>321</sup> It references the obsessive touch, the fetishised object. To be able to touch a work is to feel close to it,

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<sup>316</sup> Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 57.

<sup>317</sup> A point argued by Arnheim is that one should not expect the impossible of words: "Language cannot do the job directly because it is no direct avenue for sensory contact with reality..."

*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>318</sup> Randolph refers to this combination of experiential elements as 'the dynamics of beholding'.

Adrian W. B. Randolph, *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-century Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 6.

Peter Haynes writes of Herel's work: "making art, and the subsequent revelation of that art, establishes a continuing series of relationships in which maker; object and viewer are enmeshed in active engagement. Each engagement is complex, fascinating, elusive and unique".

Peter Haynes, "Petr Herel: A Contemplation," in *The Cancellation Series* (Canberra: Canberra Museum and Gallery, 2006), 10.

<sup>319</sup> Mark O'Connor, "Petr Herel on Labyrinth Press," *National Library of Australia News* (1995): 44.

<sup>320</sup> For the viewer to touch work during interpretation is to connect with material also touched by the artist during making.

Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 40.

<sup>321</sup> Alain de Mijolla, "Coprophilia," *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005).



to develop a particular relationship with it defined somewhat by physical intimacy. Another element of physical intimacy is created between artist and viewer: “it is the hand that has produced these volumes and the hand that has consumed them”.<sup>322</sup> As it was the hand that made these works, it should be the hand that receives them.<sup>323</sup>

Holding Herel’s work is not only being close to the book object but also to the artist himself. The artist places great emphasis upon tactility, and one can imagine the physical effort required to create his books, in which there is strong evidence of the hand. In turning the pages of one of his works, the viewer is mirroring Herel’s gestures with their own. If one were to create a time lapse of the entire life of a Herel work, they would be able to see the artist’s hand movements dancing about with those who have turned its pages since. It is a sensual, intimate, and physical performance. Without touch this path of interpretation is impossible, this particular experience lost. Touch should be reinstated in the discussion of Herel’s work to allow for as much interpretive scope as possible, and a vocabulary with which to share these encounters in an academically valid tone needs to be developed.

### *Performance*

I think again of that first meeting in the artist’s Melbourne home. I have a stack of the artist’s work in front of me, and I am leafing through each one. Curiously, Herel sits at the other end of the table from me. He rests his head in his hand, and each time I look up from a page he is watching intently, silent. I become self-conscious of my movements as I feel him watching me. He is observing me interact with his work. This exchange, this private moment, becomes an extension of the performance of Herel’s artists’ books. It becomes an extension of both his and my interaction with the work.

To encounter one of Herel’s works is a performative action. The artist’s book encourages the viewer to consider their interaction with the art object as an extended performance in itself. The viewer and object are tied together in an interpretive kind of dance, a theatrical act: “performativity—or, commonly, ‘performance’—is everywhere in life, from ordinary gestures to macrodramas”.<sup>324</sup> Indeed performance is present in the everyday, enacted through gestures, movements, and interactions one might neglect to give significance to.<sup>325</sup> While previous literature uses examples including ‘ceremonies’, ‘professional roles’, ‘family scenes’, and ‘sports’ as everyday performances, this approach can also be extended and

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<sup>322</sup> Stewart, op cit., 40.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>324</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), 326.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., xvii.

newly applied to the encounter of Herel's artists' books.<sup>326</sup> Herel's work is made active through slow looking, repeated viewing, and touch—the artist's book is an object that requires viewers to physically navigate its interior themselves. By needing someone to activate it, the artist's book inherently involves performance and a personal interaction between work, viewer, and artist.<sup>327</sup>

In touching the pages of a Herel work, I am acting in a larger performance of reading and seeing. This challenges previously held beliefs in Western theory that theatricality is experienced only through the eyes.<sup>328</sup> In the case of the artist's book, eyes share this role with fingers. As one moves throughout Herel's work with their hands, they perform the physical acts of reading—fingers touching pages, head tilting to one side, shoulders leaning forward over table. These are quiet gestures. In writing that can be associated with slow looking, Richard Schechner writes of the value of 'non-doing':

Perhaps someday we will learn that the full scope of performing, like living, involves not only the push of doing but the release of undoing, the meditation of non-doing.<sup>329</sup>

By performing an interpretation comprising quiet gestures, one engages with non-doing. This is not to say that such interaction is devoid of meaning, but instead that it generates a silent space for focussed, experiential analysis. Taking time is important to Herel's practice, and as such it should have similar significance in the interpretation of his work. There is rich analysis to be found in a self-conscious performance, in an intentionally slow-paced and tactile interaction.

The examination of the performative qualities of Herel's work reveals a line of communication between viewer and artist. The viewer is not what Schechner refers to as a 'stagnant lump' whose complacency requires coaching into a singular, objective understanding.<sup>330</sup> Instead, they have a great role to play in the activation of a work: "artists

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<sup>326</sup> Schechner discusses these various activities throughout his text.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Haynes again writes of Herel's work: "ultimately Herel's art incorporates an aesthetic of affirmation in which the simultaneous transparencies of the artist's experience are united with the experiences of his viewers, to produce both an aesthetic and social (human) relationship between artist, object and viewer". Peter Haynes, "Petr Herel: A Contemplation," in *The Cancellation Series* (Canberra: Canberra Museum and Gallery, 2006), 15.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>330</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), 234.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

Umberto Eco describes an object that encourages subjective, participatory interpretation as 'open': "a work of art, therefore, is a complete and closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity".

and audiences co-create together in exactly the same time/space”.<sup>331</sup> As the viewer moves through one of Herel’s books, they are bringing to life pages that would otherwise be contained and dormant within a closed object. They are choosing which parts of the book are given time and space, and as such the viewer is acting upon the work. Riggins identifies two different ‘modes’ applicable to an object— ‘active’ and ‘passive’.<sup>332</sup> ‘Active mode’ refers to objects that are being touched, caressed, or moved. ‘Passive mode’ refers to objects that are being contemplated irrespective of original intentions.<sup>333</sup> Analysing Herel’s work requires the viewer become active in their interpretation of the artist’s book.

Herel’s performative books inspire the questioning as to when and how interpretation begins and ends. Schechner asks his own set of larger, philosophical questions brought on by the contemplation of performance:

When is a performance a performance? How long does a strip of behaviour have to be before it can be said to be performable in the ritual or aesthetic sense? When strips of behaviour are taken from one context and played in another does it make any difference if, in the replaying, the strip means something entirely different from what it meant ‘originally’?<sup>334</sup>

As Herel’s work counteracts contemporary instant gratification, identifying the performative nature of the artist’s book demands a questioning of the very act of interpretation itself. The viewer is required to be self-aware of their role in a work’s activation, and what it is to interpret an active work. Herel’s work demonstrates the larger process of interpretation is an act of performance itself.

Ideas of performance can be applied to the argument that Herel’s work creates a larger interpretive space. As previously discussed, the artist hopes to create an intimate atmosphere between book and viewer. For some, the idea of performance might suggest loud, defined, and deliberate action. Yet Herel plays with this noisy image by instead facilitating a performance marked by silence—introspection, intimacy, and delicate actions. Susan Sontag (1933-2004) espoused the value of silence as performance in her essay *The Aesthetics of Silence* (1969).<sup>335</sup> Though silence may be used to create a distance between artist and viewer, in Herel’s case it is arguably the opposite in bringing artist and viewer closer

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Umberto Eco, “The Poetics of the Open Work,” in *Participation*, ed. Claire Bishop (London: Whitechapel, 2006), 22.

<sup>331</sup> Schechner, op cit., 230.

<sup>332</sup> Stephen Harold Riggins, *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 111.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), 324.

<sup>335</sup> Susan Sontag, “The Aesthetics of Silence,” in *Styles of Radical Will* (Picador: New York, 1969).

together. Silence makes for the feeling of a one-on-one interaction, with the artist's book acting to facilitate this interaction. Sontag emphasises the interpretive possibilities of silence:

The notions of silence, emptiness, reduction, sketch out new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc. —specifically, either for having a more immediate, sensuous experience of art or for confronting the art work in a more conscious, conceptual way.<sup>336</sup>

This elucidation reiterates the significance of silence, of the quiet and intimate interaction, which is a large component of the performance with Herel's work. The artist is not only creating a work of art but a corresponding atmosphere in which to interact with it. The interpretation of his work is a performance that extends beyond the page and into the room.

The discussion of new ways with which to interpret Herel's work begs the question as to how we describe the experience of art. More specifically, how we might describe the experience of encountering one of Herel's artist's books, in a manner that is both appropriately emotive but also academically rigorous. The proposed answer to this is a newly modified formal analysis that pays respect to traditional explorations of formal qualities and iconography, but also references interpretations drawn from touch, slow looking and performance. It celebrates the presence of the artist and the conceptual connections created between artist, artwork and viewer through subjective and sensory interaction.

The experience of the encounter is two-sided: the experience itself in real time, and the subsequent articulation of the encounter. In the case of Herel's work, as is the case when exploring any artwork using an experiential lens, one is researching to understand, writing to understand, looking to understand, and touching to understand. Herel supports a multifaceted interpretation of his work, stating that when teaching as head of the Graphic Investigation Workshop, his method was to "embrace a plurality of approaches".<sup>337</sup> Furthermore, the artist speaks of looking at larger questions in his work, making it necessary during analysis to mirror this wide scope and integrate as many interpretive methods as possible: "I am looking, even when surreal, at larger patterns of what it means

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>337</sup> Mark O'Connor, "Petr Herel on Labyrinth Press," *National Library of Australia News* (1995): 44.

to be an integral human being”.<sup>338</sup> The broader experiential interpretation proposed by this thesis is necessary to understanding Herel’s artist book practice.

While the interpretation of Herel’s work refutes Roland Barthes’ overarching call for interpretation void of authorial presence, this comparison does demonstrate the kind of attitude previously restricting subjective interpretation. Barthes advocates the interpretation of a literary piece without the consideration of the author, stating: “the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author”.<sup>339</sup> According to this perspective, society relies too heavily upon the writer’s own history to interpret their stories. The analysis of Herel’s artist book practice critiques this attitude. Touch and slow looking rely on a perceived relationship created between not only book and viewer, but artist and viewer as well.

The artist’s presence needs to inform this new subjective interpretation, as it is his hands that created the page, as well as the page itself, that one engages in a performance with. Herel’s work is often ambiguous; the artist does not readily give answers, and instead refrains from dictating any concrete meaning. Herel’s books suggest that the process of meaning making is more than acquiring a perceived concrete understanding. Barthes wrote that “language knows a ‘subject’, not a ‘person’,” but the artist’s book acts against this rhetoric.<sup>340</sup> It knows not only a person but several people—the artist, and those who view the work. This sense of ‘person’ is in direct relation to the intentional creation of an intimate, personal space. If one applied Barthes’ theory to Herel’s work in a blanket manner, the rich analyses gained from slow looking and touch would be entirely denied. If one was to remove the significant sense of intimacy by eliminating the artist’s presence, it might be argued that the death of the author is akin to the death of the encounter.

Barthes presents several further ideas that, however ironically, can be interpreted as contributing to the argument for a new, experiential analysis of Herel’s work. The notion of the modern writer as “born simultaneously with his text” is particularly valuable.<sup>341</sup> Engaging with an experiential art object, the viewer brings to life a perceived presence of the artist when interacting so physically with his work. Herel has created a space inextricably embodied by the interaction between artist, work, and viewer. Without the artist, the viewer loses a sense of presence crucial to the development of intimacy. Barthes additionally writes of the need to consider the ‘multiple writings’ of a text as ultimately

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 143.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>341</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 145.

brought together by the reader.<sup>342</sup> In the case of Herel's work, the artist is one of the voices working in this unity. Herel is creating a new space that doesn't pit reader against author, but instead celebrates an interactive collaboration.

Herel's books expose the need for a new method of analysis that incorporates conventional formal and iconographical study with a phenomenological and experiential discussion of touch, slow looking, repeated viewing, performance, the aberrant object, the influence of environment, and value. This need not necessarily manifest itself as a structure marked by separated methods, but rather a cohesive analysis throughout which these concepts are interwoven. It seems only appropriate to return to the book that marked the beginning, referenced at the start of this chapter, as a final example of experimenting with this innovative and necessary method of interpretation—Herel's *Excerpts from Inland* (2013), with selected text from Gerald Murnane (1939-).

Sitting in the Special Collections Reading Room at the National Library of Australia, *Excerpts from Inland* is presented to me within a hard-covered box, closed with two Velcro spots. To find the book itself, I must carefully open the four, layered flaps. The library context is one that allows for touch. Researchers are spread throughout the Special Collections Reading Room, each with their own slice of desk space, with librarians sitting by the door. Individual readers are left alone with their respective books.

The front cover, the first contact I have with the work, already presents a sense of aberrant possibility (Fig. 4a). There is no text on this off-white page. A plate-mark is visible, however upon first glance does not appear to contain any visible print within its edges. Yet by using my fingers, it becomes evident that there are little marks to be found (Fig. 4b). Touch makes what previously did not seem to exist suddenly evident. Extremely faint green ink moves around this small group of delicately spotted shapes. These forms have a seaweed, algae-like appearance, as if I am looking at a scientific sample in the base of a Petri dish. Considering these little growths leads to a contemplation of ideas of macro and micro, of life and of death. Perhaps these bacterial beings are the marks of a beginning, signifying growth, or perhaps they are the marks of a death, an ending. They very much reflect the artist's preoccupation with "Growth" and "Decay".<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Barthes reiterates the value of the individual reader (or in Herel's case, viewer): "in this way is revealed the whole being of writing; a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other, into parody, into contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of..." Ibid., 147.

<sup>343</sup> The capitalisation of these words is deliberate, mirroring Herel's own.

Moving towards the title page, I am confronted by a thin layer of translucent paper that rests over the informative text (Fig. 4c-e). Upon this translucent paper Herel has printed the image of an ambiguous, shady mass. I am required to lift up the fragile sheet to see it more clearly. It subsequently becomes evident that this figure does not have a form to clearly see. It is reminiscent of an inkblot, a nebulous octopus or squid, perhaps a Kraken-esque monstrosity or cloud heavy with an angry storm. In comparison to this uncertain form, this formless form, the plate-mark appears as though it was made with the sharpest of plate edges, and the title has been printed using a sharp font.

This sense of aberrant ambiguity continues with a page of Murnane's prose: "...I saw ghosts of men staring sometimes at ghosts of glass panes" (Fig. 4f). Perhaps Herel's vague printed shape references this supernatural preoccupation. Herel's ghost is printed again on a translucent page inserted between this text and the next page, also featuring more writing. As I turn the page to read the following lines, I am able to contemplate the image as it interacts with the new text in reverse. This raises the question as to whether I can discern the front from the back of something I cannot even identify. Note how this sense of orientation comes so immediately from having viewed a particular perspective first—a reflection of the desire to classify and categorise to understand.<sup>344</sup> In this print on translucent paper, the figure appears darker, and the ink heavier. It rests more concretely on the page and yet, despite this increased 'clarity', I am no closer to having a definite idea of what the figure is. It remains an unclear, mollusc-like mass.

The final double page spread of *Excerpts* features two mirrored prints of this same shape on each page (Fig. 4g). The left print is fainter than that on the right, yet appears heavier in having more text printed beneath it. Herel's choice of repeated image, this time mirrored, is an exploration of duality, of different planes of existence, of different methods of existing, of the *doppelgänger*. The use of dark, organic green emphasises this feeling, as do the shimmering specks to be found within the darkest pools of ink in the right-hand figure. Murnane's text reads: "...And I went on writing so that ghosts of images of pages of mine would drift over ghosts of plains in a ghost world towards ghosts of images of skies in libraries of ghosts of the ghosts of books". Herel's repetitive ghost forms pose provocative questions as to the nature of ghosts—what they might see of themselves, whether they constitute something or nothing.<sup>345</sup> These questions both embody and interrogate

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Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, April 13, 2017.

<sup>344</sup> Larger, metaphysical questions arise: does there need to be complete understanding of an image? Can understanding an image be achieved despite not being able to identify its subject matter?

<sup>345</sup> These metaphysical questions include: can ghosts have a mirror image—can they look in a mirror and see themselves? In this sense, in contemplating these forms, is one looking at something, or is one looking at

aberrance. A line on the last page reads: “Inserted four ghost pages and one etching by Petr Herel”. Not only are the figures ghostly, but their technique is ghostly too—the same plate repeated.

Conducting experiments in slow looking and repeated viewing, as well as applying touch and an examination of performance to Herel’s work, demonstrates the validity of a phenomenological analysis of the artist’s book. This new, combined approach remains faithful to conventional formal analysis in art history, but interweaves this with study of the fundamental experiential qualities of the book as art object. Subjective and academic is a false dichotomy, an attitude originally encouraged by disdain for first person analysis. I have proposed an innovative approach that answers the demand that the aberrant artist’s book makes for interpretation that is both informed and intimate.

The experiential method of analysis developed in this chapter provides an essential means to understand Herel’s artist book practice. It can also be extended as a valid method for understanding the artist’s book more generally, and furthermore the art object. This new methodology combines touch, slow looking, and performance to present a unique, scholastically valid interpretive lexicon. Such methodologies and concepts have not previously been brought together to analyse Herel’s work, and thus their combination presents an innovative pathway with an academic, personal tone that is both conceptual and corporeal.<sup>346</sup> Herel’s choice of book as medium requires language that addresses its ‘material aura’.<sup>347</sup> The act of viewing, of holding a book in one’s hand, is undoubtedly a physical, intimate one. By subverting the typical contents of the codex, Herel’s artists’ books require the viewer to engage with a new paradigm of the book as a temporal, experiential, and embodied art object.

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nothing? Is it possible for ‘nothing’ to have a form? Just because we cannot understand something, does it then become nothing? Is this form the shape of all the things one does not understand? The ghost of all of one’s past ideas, abandoned due to a lack of clear place to apply them, a lack of category to place them in? Are these images simultaneously empty of meaning and full of meaning?

<sup>346</sup> Riggins supports such a movement, writing: “in order to construct a more valid, more meaningful, and eventually more explanatory theory and method of material culture process and its interpretation, we need to develop a semiotics of visual phenomena. Such a theory would take into account the full spatial, temporal, and gestural dimensionality of the artefact. Although bounded within the frame of its own material existence, it is neither static nor isolated”.

Stephen Harold Riggins, *The Socialness of Things: Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 341.

<sup>347</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 22.



## **Part Two**

### **Interpretation**

## Chapter Three

### The Surreal Artist's Book

As Petr Herel himself identifies the significance influence of Surrealism upon his work, it is essential to apply concepts proposed by Surrealist theorists and artists to the investigation of his books if such investigations are to be considered thorough.<sup>348</sup> As this chapter will demonstrate, it is significantly fruitful to interpret Herel's work using Surrealist themes of the exquisite corpse, the erotic, and Outsider Art. Both individually and as parts of a broader approach, these frameworks form an important part of a critical engagement with the artist's book as aberrant, poetic art object, demonstrated by analyses of the books *The Distant Present: Three Poems from the Book of Epigrams* (2011), *Delicate Interactions* (2013), *La Peau du Fantôme = Phantom Skin* (1987), *Borges Sequel* (1982), and *Fragments et Grains de Pollen de Novalis* (1980). This engagement with the otherness of Surrealism will also be explored through an examination of the visitor experience at *La Halle Saint Pierre*, a museum identified by Herel as important to his time spent in Paris.<sup>349</sup>

The Surrealists strove to both encounter and express the experience of an alternate 'reality'—that of 'surreality'.<sup>350</sup> Surrealism was not just restricted to the arts, but extended to drama, psychology, philosophy and poetry.<sup>351</sup> This is the broadest and most introductory sense in which Surrealism is a constructive paradigm through which to interpret Herel's work—just as his artists' books include literature, art and craftsmanship, Surrealism embraced perceived inextricable links between word and image, the poet and the artist.

The study of Herel's artist book practice presents the opportunity to relate his work to European Surrealist traditions and his homeland of Czechoslovakia, and consider the artist's current contemporary Australian context. At Surrealism's very beginnings, Renée Riese Hubert comments that artists "dealt with the book in a less revolutionary and more practical manner than their immediate predecessors".<sup>352</sup> However, this is not to say they were not experimental. Instead, artists investigated the physical qualities of the codex by

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<sup>348</sup> In an interview with Professor Sasha Grishin, the artist comments on an exhibition in 2000: "two things particularly struck me in the way the exhibition was received in Prague. The first is what I would call the 'Czech sensibility' that was recognised as being constant in my work...Although I do not work with a Czech consciousness at the forefront of my mind, the whole Bohemian heritage—that peculiar type of Gothic Surrealism, or what is possibly more accurately described as the illusion of the existence of Surrealism—is never distant from the concerns in my art".

Sasha Grishin, "Interview with Petr Herel," *Grapheion*, no. 15–16 (2000): 140.

<sup>349</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2016.

<sup>350</sup> Christopher Chapman, *Surrealism in Australia* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1993), 78.

<sup>351</sup> Herbert Read, *Art Now: An Introduction to the Theory of Modern Painting and Sculpture* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 120.

<sup>352</sup> Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 6.

subverting intentionally subtle details rather than transforming the book into a more extreme sculptural work. In support of this interpretation, Hubert comments: “Surrealist books are experimental not only in their use of medium but in the presentation of the book itself”.<sup>353</sup> He gives the examples of Max Ernst’s *Maximiliana* (1964) and Joan Miro’s earlier *Parler Seul* (1948-50) as interrogating the book’s assumed promise of easy communication and traditional ‘learning’.<sup>354</sup> In both of these examples, the artists present language and the alphabet in an entirely unconventional, and sometimes incomprehensible, manner, while still adhering to familiar formatting. Their work challenges the viewer to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of language and the alphabet, and presents an alternative method of reading that is aesthetic rather than semantic.<sup>355</sup>

Surrealist artists’ books, continuing the Cubist aversion to mimesis, also discredited the need for a book’s imagery to be faithful to its text.<sup>356</sup> Examples of these attitudes include *Simulacre* (1925) by Andre Masson, with accompanying poetry by Michel Leiris, and Yves Tanguy and Benjamin Peet’s *Dormir, Dormir dans les Pierres* (1927).<sup>357</sup> The Surrealists played with this relationship between image and text to the extent that they reversed the typical order in which collaboration was undertaken, mirroring an approach first taken much earlier by the likes of British poet William Combe, who wrote text to accompany the already existent etchings of Thomas Rowlandson’s *English Dance of Death* (1903).<sup>358</sup> Though the medium of the book was not the primary focus of Surrealist artists, they did challenge notions of the book in a distinctively subtle manner. Such examples, even briefly cited, demonstrate the ties between art and literature at the very heart of the movement.

In this chapter, it will be argued that Herel’s ethos and practice can be productively interpreted through a Surrealist lens, and as such the artist’s work represents, in part, a contemporary continuation of the movement. As Anna Balakian comments: “Surrealism in art has had a prevailing unity over the years, unmarred by artists’ peregrinations from country to country and hemisphere to hemisphere”.<sup>359</sup> Herel exemplifies this timeless and transcontinental fascination with the subconscious and the dream state, as well as the expression of an alternative version of current reality.

The Surrealist concepts referred to throughout this chapter should not be considered a uniquely French preoccupation, especially in relation to Herel’s work. Relevant to the

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<sup>353</sup> Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 15.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>355</sup> The formal analysis of language in Herel’s work is the focus of upcoming Chapter Four.

<sup>356</sup> Hubert, op cit., 256.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 28, 37.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>359</sup> Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (London: Unwin Books, 1972), 208.

artist's Czech heritage, it is important to recognise that Surrealism was also the passionate interest of a group of Czech artists in the 1930s, who under the initiation of poet Vítězslav Nezval (1900-1958) formed the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia in March 1934.<sup>360</sup> Like their French counterparts, with whom the group undertook creative exchange through collaboration, visits, and publications, the Czech Surrealists were interested in exploring ideas of eroticism, the dream state, and ideas of beauty in their art.<sup>361</sup> Due to this largely shared attitude towards creative practice, interpretation and experimentation, the Surrealist concepts used to discuss Herel's work in this chapter should be considered foundational ideas that relate to both French and Czech contexts—such ideas were clearly not restricted by borders, and Herel's time spent in both France and the now Czech Republic allows for a larger, inclusive application of the Surrealist paradigm to his work.

The application of surreal ideas to the study of Herel's work is further validated by the contemporary continuation of the movement in the Czech Republic. Indeed after the dissolution of the historical Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia in the early 1940s, a new group was formed later that decade that continues today: the Contemporary Czech and Slovak Surrealist Group.<sup>362</sup> This group now boasts a larger membership than the historical collective to which it traces its roots, and continues to be interested with surreal approaches to subverting traditional imagery and interpretation through games.<sup>363</sup> Acknowledging Surrealism as a continuing, contemporary preoccupation in Czech art is important to the analysis of surreal concepts in relation to Herel's work, as it proves this innovative discussion reflects a continuing interest in the artist's homeland. Analysing Herel's work in relation to Surrealism is a method that dynamically crosses borders and moves through time.

Herel subverts the traditional book object; he transforms the codex into an art object by bringing to life its latent possibilities as a previously overlooked, everyday object. Surrealism aimed to deconstruct the previous dogma surrounding objects and transform them into inspirational items: objects had potential and potency. An integral focus of the

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<sup>360</sup> Lenka Bydžovská, "Against the Current: The Story of the Surrealist Group of Czechoslovakia," *Papers of Surrealism: Centre for the Study of Surrealism and Its Legacies*, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 1.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

Breton, his wife Jacqueline, and Éluard visited Prague in the spring of 1935, with Breton delivering three lectures discussing Surrealism and the object. French and Czech counterparts also came together to collaborate on *The International Bulletin of Surrealism*, first published in 1936.

*Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>362</sup> Krzysztof Fijakowski, "Invention, Imagination, Interpretation: Collective Activity in the Contemporary Czech and Slovak Surrealist Group," *Papers of Surrealism: Centre for the Study of Surrealism and Its Legacies*, no. 3 (Spring 2005): 1.

<sup>363</sup> Particularly relevant to this new analysis of Herel's work is the art and writing of member Jan Švankmajer, discussed in Chapter Two.

*Ibid.*

Surrealists, supported by the essays of seminal figures including André Breton, Louis Aragon and Salvador Dalí was the critical dissection of the object—in everyday life as well as art. Their writing argued the need to engage with the object in a new way. Tied to this idea were explorations of the potential of typically discarded or overlooked items, a celebration of the beauty to be found in the everyday, and the articulation of the ‘marvellous’. While the Surrealists were striving to subvert previous focuses on realism, they were further subversive in doing so by throwing underappreciated everyday objects into the spotlight. They made subtle materials revolutionary.

The reassessment of the object was one that involved both Surrealist theorists and artists alike. Breton and his contemporaries worked to “acquire an unexpected knowledge of objects, by discovering the representative range and power of certain objects”.<sup>364</sup> Such experimentation was named *Research on Irrational Knowledge of the Object*, and involved the consideration of objects beyond practical potentials, as tangible representations of malleable concepts that change according to their context.<sup>365</sup> The aim was to separate objects from restrictive, dictated definitions—to set them free, into a space in which they proposed infinite possibilities and creative applications. It was an urgent matter of ‘breaking down normal associations’, so that objects could still be used physically but not solely in the one manner.<sup>366</sup> The object was being confrontationally revolutionized—it was the *crise de l’objet*.<sup>367</sup>

Herel’s work demonstrates that the book as artistic medium is a sure representation of this reassessment of the object. Contemporary readers often focus attention upon the information inside of the book. They value the object for its contents, the information it is communicating, rather than for its physical qualities. They are hungry for the message it contains, ravenously discarding the book-as-container that holds it. In this case, the codex becomes packaging, the wrapping paper hastily thrown to the side of the present encased within. But this wrapping paper was carefully folded, its corners stuck down with an aptly cut length of diagonally positioned sticky-tape. It was intentional, and represents an

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<sup>364</sup> Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (London: Unwin Books, 1972), 172-173.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

In his essay *The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment* (1932), Dalí wrote of the four phases the new surreal object had undergone: “the object exists outside us, without our taking part in it (anthropomorphic articles); the object assumes the immovable shape of desire and acts upon our contemplation (dream-state articles); the object is movable and such that it can be acted upon (articles operating symbolically) and; the object tends to bring about our fusion with it and makes us pursue the formation of a unity with it (hunger for the article and edible articles)”.

Lucy R. Lippard, *Surrealists on Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 87-96.

<sup>366</sup> Balakian, op cit., 172.

<sup>367</sup> Haim Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 43.

investment of time. In the first moments of his creative practice, by choosing the oft-overlooked book to be his medium, Herel challenges habitual handling of the codex.

Promoting an experience that involves the entire body, from the intangible threads of the mind to the physical extremities of the fingers, the Surrealist's attitude towards art articulated "the overflow of intensified life experience".<sup>368</sup> This full-body expression demonstrated a much-celebrated sense of '(self) referentiality', in direct contrast with what Breton observed as a contemporary world in which the act of the metaphysical experience was met with scorn—"the experience] paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge".<sup>369</sup> Turning to within oneself in an act of self-reference and internal observation was crucial, giving credit to the inner spirit and validating personal experience.<sup>370</sup> This emphasis on the individual, this repeated use of the 'self' prefix, illustrates the Surrealist desire to create a self-aware, reflexive approach to creating and interpreting art.

Herel's process is overwhelmingly physical—and not just in the basic sense of using his body to mechanically perform mark-making movements. His process is one that envelops both the mind and the body. It brings together these two elements to create an art object, an artist's book that is overwhelmingly metaphysical. The practice of artist book making is the result of a physical production line. Every part of the process is certainly physical. Even before making the book itself, the fingertips touch different paper options, stroke the lengths of string used to bind these pages together, dip paper into dye. Once having made these foundational decisions, there is the printmaking. Etching and engraving—the very utterance of these techniques arouses imagery of the artist standing over a table, plotting composition and design, weighty plate in hand, before leaning over and beginning the momentous first mark, burin to plate or stone. After the printing comes the binding of pages, hinting at a final form. These movements pay their respects to histories past, and are a physical manifestation of the relationship between Herel's mind and hands. The decisions the artist makes in creating his books directly reflect his intellectual passion for literature, for poetry, and for the history of the book and the artist's book, as well as his love of printmaking, drawing, and typeset. This act of creation certainly reflects Surrealist self-reference—Herel is consciously proposing a new perspective by means of his own re-

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<sup>368</sup> Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (London: Unwin Books, 1972), 174.

<sup>369</sup> Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 343.

André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 10.

<sup>370</sup> In his 1930 *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* Breton articulated this need: "Surrealism basically asks these people to bring to the accomplishment of their mission a new awareness, to perform an act of self-observation, which in their case is of very exceptional value, to compensate for what is insufficient about the penetration of so-called "artistic" states of mind by men who for the most part are not artists but doctors". Breton, *op cit.*, 160-161.

imagination. Furthermore, this created object is less transient than his bodily flesh—it will certainly live beyond the artist’s own physical life. From Herel’s books larger metaphysical questions arise, interrogating why we make what we make, and what drives us to make in the very first place.

When creating their new paradigm, the Surrealists worked to consider not only their own participation with art but also the viewer’s. In viewing a Surrealist object or artwork, the previously ignorant spectator was going to need encouragement and the inspiration to experience it in the new manner the artist intended. Haim Finkelstein writes:

Philosophically, the relationship between man and the object involves an interchange between mind and matter; the mind attempts to situate matter within a framework which is acceptable to it.<sup>371</sup>

The surreal object worked to reassemble, or at least discombobulate, this so-called ‘acceptable framework’. In doing so, it encouraged the viewer to become aware of what Breton referred to as “the absolute rationalism that is still in vogue”.<sup>372</sup> Once made aware of this rational approach as a socially conditioned trend, the viewer might be able to compartmentalise it and consider other angles. Viewers were inspired to act under the influence of what Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron describes as the ‘Surrealist consciousness’, in which the individual “presents itself as pure subjectivity and also (without paradox) as pure dynamism defining itself through its acts”.<sup>373</sup> The viewer was no longer burdened with the need to rationally define and understand the world; they were instead now open to the infinite possibilities and tangents it presented. They were to experience the world in a manner free of rigid, intellectual understanding. The artist’s responsibility in this paradigmatic transformation was to create works that inspired such a change. They needed to “arouse in the spectator the curiosity to grasp his image”.<sup>374</sup> Paul Nougé wrote: “It is not enough to create an object, it is not enough for it to be. We must show that it can, by some artifice, arouse in the spectator, the desire, the need to see”.<sup>375</sup> Curiosity aroused, the viewer’s eyes would be opened to new possibilities, in which “[art] no longer acts as a sedative but as a stimulus, arrests the mind in its restless, dissatisfied wanderings, and fixes its attention in a position of significant immobility, similar perhaps to the stillness of a religious ecstasy”.<sup>376</sup> Breton adamantly referred to the unquestioning acceptance of

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<sup>371</sup> Haim Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>372</sup> André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 9.

<sup>373</sup> Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 112.

<sup>374</sup> Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (London: Unwin Books, 1972), 175.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

information or instruction as “fatal ignorance”.<sup>377</sup> In their celebration of an alternative, surreal manner of thinking, artists had to instil this celebration of an alternative perspective in their audience.

Much like Herel’s conscious maintenance of the traditional book codex, the Surrealists did not aim to entirely abstract objects, rather repurpose those already in existence. Finkelstein urges us to “not lose sight of the fact that even at the height of their theoretical speculations, Dalí and Breton never cease contact with the world of things”.<sup>378</sup> They did, however, work to “break down...normal associations” of objects, referred to as the process of disorientation, or *dépayesement*: “...this is not abstract art, but just the opposite: the materialization of the abstract, the crystallization of the mental image”.<sup>379</sup> In the case of the everyday object, this meant elevating it to a space where it was the primary focus. This dispelled any preconceived ideas of subjects needing to be either austere or ostentatious to warrant artistic study, as might be said for the lush, opulent still lifes of seventeenth century Haarlem.<sup>380</sup> The quiet objects of everyday life were given an appreciation they did not demand, but nevertheless deserved.

This concept of the everyday object, filled with potential, can be linked to the idea of the *merveilleux quotidien*—the marvellous of the everyday.<sup>381</sup> To define the marvellous in a concrete and scholarly manner presents difficulties, and true to their self-referential focus the Surrealists did not attempt to do so. Instead, they described it experientially, as an embodied process, a feeling. Lippard posits:

Certainly the marvellous appears to the person who can consider it slowly as a dialectical urgency born of another, lost urgency. The marvellous is opposed to the mechanical...certainly the marvellous is born of the refusal of one reality, but also of the development of a new relationship, a new reality liberated by that refusal.<sup>382</sup>

The Surrealists felt the urgency of the marvellous. Their feelings of the marvellous, their feeling marvellous, was born out of the miracle of the everyday made into a new surprise through displacement and play. By dislocating the object from its rational plane and

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<sup>377</sup> André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 140.

<sup>378</sup> Haim Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>379</sup> Balakian, op cit., 193.

<sup>380</sup> As Balakian expands: “...often the simplest ones [objects] are the most enigmatic, the most charged with possible contacts with our mental activity, so that actually the things that surround us are not really objects but become the subjects of our spiritual environment”.

*Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>381</sup> Breton wrote that it was Surrealism’s “duty to make the point of the marvellous in 1930”.

*Ibid.*, 174.

Lucy R. Lippard, *Surrealists on Art* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 37.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*



appreciating the overlooked, the marvellous was born. It was a magnetic spirit that drew in the viewer.<sup>383</sup> In their great passion for the marvellous, the Surrealists shared the sensation through their art and inspired it in their viewers. It was the artist's responsibility to chase after the marvellous, and their art's responsibility to share it once caught.

A new analysis of Herel's work is to be found by first acknowledging the influence of our preconceived 'webs' of understanding, and then applying a Surrealist attitude of freeing ourselves from this cage. The viewer is introduced to a myriad of possibilities and a multitude of different contemplative pathways. They consider the spiritual and mindful process of creating the book in hand, as well as its place within a tactile line of production. They consider the artist's motivations in choosing the book as art object, and the message he is trying to communicate in doing so. Herel's artists' books both embody and project a sense of the marvellous. By choosing an everyday object and making it subtly considered and beautiful, by not contorting it to the point of complete abstraction but highlighting its unassuming and latent possibility, Herel's work epitomises the marvellous. The concept of experiencing the marvellous provides an innovative manner to articulate the emotive encounter of Herel's artists' books, an experiential analysis legitimised by Breton's precedence.

The application of Surrealism to the analysis of the art object proves the value of interpreting Herel's work through this specific paradigm. Picking up any of Herel's artists' books, the viewer begins their own *Research of the Irrational Knowledge of the Object*. The analysis of Herel's 2011 work *The Distant Present: Three Poems from the Book of Epigrams*, with Greek-Australian poet Dimitris Tsaloumas, demonstrates this innovation. However, before making tangible links between Surrealism and a specific Herel work, one might first consider how the conventional book fits generally into a person's life. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, at its most integral the book has become an everyday kind of object. Books teach (textbooks, cookbooks), help (manuals), and tell stories (children's stories, fiction). They are a vessel communicating knowledge. Most people have some understanding of the place books have within everyday life. For many, books and reading are an important part of day-to-day life. Herel's books question the nature of this relationship.

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<sup>383</sup> As Breton emphasised in his manifesto: "at this juncture, my intention was merely to mark a point by noting the hate of the marvellous which rages in certain men, this absurdity beneath which they try to bury it. Let us not mince words: the marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful, in fact only the marvellous is beautiful".

André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 14.

*The Distant Present* appears at first to conform to preconceived notions of the book, but further study reveals a reimagination of the book as art object. It resembles the conventional codex with a familiar format of front and back cover with pages inside, and though square its proportions (25.0 x 21.5cm) are otherwise unremarkable. *The Distant Present* fits into my hand like many of the books before it, projecting a comforting familiarity (Fig. 1a). As a result of this presumed conformity, I am reasonably confident as to what the interior pages will look like, the formulaic structure of the book's internal organs. Past experiences as a reader have drilled the typical codex into the forefront of my information-hungry, positivistic mind. However, as I open *The Distant Present* and begin to work through its pages, I become aware of the artist's book's marvellous, aberrant reimagination. My consciousness of my approach to such an object is immensely heightened. This grouping of pages, however humble, requires an engagement different from the conventional book. Like the Surrealists, Herel demands a shift in perspective through a quietly subversive work. The subtlety of his transformation of book into art object requires me to re-evaluate my behaviour and methods of analysis.

*The Distant Present* challenges preconceived ideas of the book in several ways. These include the placement of text, the printed imagery, the use of paper, and layout. The compositional placement of Tsaloumas' poetry changes over time. It shifts around, demonstrating the physical real estate of the page (Fig. 1b). The sulphur etching is immediately non-illustrative, and involves a repetition of the same, phantom-like mass of lines and smoke printed in several different colours (Fig. 1c). As I turn the pages, the texture of the paper becomes an important part of the physical experience. It is thin, yet has a softer quality than that of a conventional book. It feels considered, a deliberate choice. Finally, image and text do not interact over a double page spread, as experienced in an ordinary book. Prints and poetry fill only the right hand pages. Turning the pages and regarding the blank left hand side, I notice the imprint of the previous plate through the sheet. This questions the chronological focus of conventional reading—by presenting remnants of pages past, Herel suggests a reading that is not straightforward, cover to cover. Instead, the pages combine to create a larger space through which viewers can travel. Rather than reading contents across and over the page, I can journey into the space of the page itself, moving between pages at my own pace, following my own direction. Page numbers float higher than expected, making me aware of my habitual return to a conventional marker of progress. In the artist's book, time is instead suspended, and these mainstream markers transform into visual forms residing on the page.

This kind of embodied, phenomenological analysis is the result of *The Distant Present* encouraging a sense of referentiality. Herel has deliberated all of the minute details that make up this larger art object. In becoming aware of this, the book is not just static, mechanical object but also a personal, experiential one. As I turn through the pages, relishing the tactility of the paper's smooth touch, thoughts return to the person who created such an object. Handling a tangible manifestation of Herel's choices, a tactile object made to be physically engaged with in an intimate space, I am particularly conscious of the artist's presence. This is further emphasised when examining the signed colophon at the rear, which includes the artist's signature scrawled in graphite pencil alongside the edition number. His choice of smudged pencil, of writing rather than printing, appears personal. This is the same signature the artist uses to sign his letters, and feels as though Herel is signing the book as a letter to me. It is an exchange between artist and viewer.

Artists' books within Herel's oeuvre such as *The Distant Present* also align with the Surrealist preoccupation with 'seeing'. In subverting the everyday and making it art object, the book arouses spectator curiosity, the 'desire to see'. *The Distant Present* elevates the conventional codex by emphasising the subtle beauty to be found in traditional elements of the book (pages, covers, text and image).

The next step in this new analysis of the artist's book *crise d'objet*, or challenge of the object, is the recognition of the marvellous. The experience of the marvellous is difficult to define—all too appropriate what with the surreal disdain for dogma and dictated ways of thinking. Experiencing the marvellous is to feel a sense of a miracle—defined by the Oxford Living Dictionary as “an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine agency”.<sup>384</sup> The artist's book performs a miracle, transforming standard codex to art object. There is a sense of new beginnings, of inexhaustible options and illimitable understanding. In using the book as medium, Herel has transported the object to a new plane of possibility. As Susan Stewart espouses:

The closure of the book is an illusion largely created by its materiality, its cover. Once the book is considered on the plane of its significant, it threatens infinity.<sup>385</sup>

Herel challenges the way in which the viewer interacts with and thinks of the book. In every communicated choice, through its thin pages and plate-marks, *The Distant Present*

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<sup>384</sup> “Miracle,” *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/miracle>.

<sup>385</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 38.

presents a non-linear narrative of the artist's relationship with the text and the book as art object. This is a story that transcends the physical object and conventional narrative. The artist's book exposes the viewer to a previously undiscovered genre and way of thinking.

Herel's artist book practice can be further explored with an analysis of the poeticised images throughout his work, first projected by the artist and then activated by the viewer. As a term, the poetic image is initially difficult to conventionally define, an abstract feeling that requires the understanding of several essential factors. These elements include Surrealism's close ties between literature and the visual arts, ideas of what constitutes image and text, a focus upon the Freudian hypnagogic dreamscape, and the notion of the 'art coefficient'. It is all of these aspects combined that bring about an experience of the poetic image; that give shape to a crucial Surrealist concept.

Surrealism celebrated the relationship between poetry and art, between the written and the visual. Academics have gone so far as to posit that poetry, especially in France during the 1920s and 30s, was travelling a road separate to the rest of literature and more aligned with art.<sup>386</sup> Together, and with their individual powers combined, art and poetry were to then collectively broach philosophy.<sup>387</sup> This marriage of the wordsmith and the artist marked the beginning of poeticised imagery. At its most fundamental, the term immediately arouses the evocative nature of a poetic phrase, something more abstract than a visual image limited to existing on paper. The relationship between the two was symbiotically beneficial—with artists and poets bouncing off each other.<sup>388</sup> Poetry and art were reaching a state of fusion. In doing so, the new phenomenon of the poetic image was created. Hubert writes: "We cannot read textuality, either verbal or plastic, in isolation—we cannot read without intertexts".<sup>389</sup> Poetry and art became one through the paradigm of the poetic image, rediscovered as a unified perspective.

For the Surrealist, and pertinent to Herel's work, both image and text were considered imagery. While there was some discussion as to the textuality of the visual, more literature comments upon the possibilities of text creating image.<sup>390</sup> In this sense, poetry could be expressed through both the written word and the visual image, and there was a sense of a

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<sup>386</sup> Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (London: Unwin Books, 1972), 30.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Balakian comments: "the concepts of Lautremont and Rimbaud were to be illustrated in art before they reached maturation in poetry, but it was also the poets who turned out to be the best critics of that art and recorded the consciousness of creation behind the work of art".

Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>389</sup> Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 24.

<sup>390</sup> As Chapman notes: "...writing and drawing [became] indistinguishable. Writing was allowed to adopt the tricks of the visual".

Christopher Chapman, *Surrealism in Australia* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1993), 2.

‘feeling’ of poetry rather than a static definition. The poetic image was poetry in motion. Along with interrupting previous dogma surrounding the object, the Surrealists would also subvert the poem. As Balakian states:

The creative role of language was strongly stressed in the Surrealists’ concept of poetry. Poetry was no longer to be an expression of ideas or emotions but the creation of a series of images...<sup>391</sup>

Alongside the visual, words were able to ignite within the viewer a series of internal images. Rather than communicating a rational, concrete message, words were used by the Surrealists as launching pads for internal journeys.<sup>392</sup> Words did not have to convey fixed meaning. They could be harnessed, as in surreal poetry, to suggest alternative paths of thinking through their seemingly nonsensical behaviours. Éluard viewed poetry as bestowing *donner à voir* upon the reader—to ‘give sight’.<sup>393</sup> Once granted this sight, it was up to the reader to travel their internal journeys with only the prompting guidance of language.

Herel’s artist book practice embodies the notion of the poetic image in several ways. His works present an interesting case in their literal combination of both text and visual, and the imagery the two create when stitched together. The medium of the book is also, and significantly, evocative of the viewers’ power when creating their own imaginative journey. Herel subtly plays with the relationship between poetry and art in his titling of works. Though the artist is determinedly not creating visual images that are simply illustrative of the text, it can be argued that his works project not a simple fidelity but a larger, spiritual one.

Upon first meeting Petr Herel at his home in 2015, the artist offered to show me some of his books. These were mostly works I had not come across in my fieldwork. Several were single codex editions, created over a decade and across continents. Around fifteen books were retrieved from a back room, and laid out on the dining room table. As I worked my way through taking notes and photographing each work, Herel sat at the other end of the table and watched. He did not move until I was finished.

Herel seemed to take some enjoyment in watching me examine his work. He was ready to comment upon particular pages, and willing to give me the time to articulate questions as I

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<sup>391</sup> Balakian, op cit., 143.

<sup>392</sup> This idea is supported by the writing of Breton, for example: “Words brought together by creative intuition could explode in a dynamic image which would be more provocative than are abortive thoughts seeking words to give them a countenance”.

André Breton, *Les Manifestes Du Surréalisme: Suivis de Prolégomènes à Un Troisième Manifeste Du Surréalisme Ou Non* (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1947), 60-61.

<sup>393</sup> Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (London: Unwin Books, 1972), 143.

continued to leaf through. After considering the concept of the poetic image, perhaps the artist was watching me create my own. Herel had the opportunity to watch his work and the viewer come together, to watch the first meeting between page and naïve eye. In my creation of a poetic image, inspired by noting his choices of binding, of paper, of text and of print, I was actively participating in a continuation of the creative process. Perhaps I was not only creating my own poetic image but also contributing to that of the artist's.

Herel adamantly states that the imagery in artists' books should not be literally illustrative.<sup>394</sup> However, it can be argued that Herel is visually faithful to his choice of texts, spiritually. The artist chose to include these sources for a reason. He chose to link these words with his own images; to incorporate them into the art objects he births into the world, transcending his own life. In this sense, he is spiritually faithful in making sure the interpretive possibilities of his works, the poetic images, remain open. He has instigated an infinite, labyrinthine field of possibilities.

Herel's embrace of the poetic image is evident in the 2013 work *Delicate Interactions*. The book contains compositional, annotated poetry by Christopher Brennan (1870-1932) and Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898), alongside contemporary additions by Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Daniel Leuwers. Brennan's poem *Criblemusicorimégraphoscopique* emphasises the inextricable ties between literature and art in Herel's work. With the text visually resembling a musical composition, words and lines sweep across the page, forming a visual poetry of words and image combined.

Herel's choice of composition reflects a fluid relationship between literal and visual. The text within *Delicate Interactions* is not linear or chronological, and in many instances the annotations are not particularly logical (Fig. 2a-b). The work is evocative in being unburdened by literal understanding, a sense of clarity achieved not in the concrete sense, but in the enlightenment of poetic thinking. The manuscript work, an unfinished project brought together in its draft form, represents a larger thought process, a visual manifestation of a brainstorm.<sup>395</sup> The book acts as a launch pad for the internal imagery so celebrated by Surrealists. I can imagine the editor deep in thought, or the sweeping sounds of the words as spoken aloud, or even that of an orchestra dipping its way through a concerto. *Delicate Interactions* inspires the creation of a subjective, dynamic image within the viewer. As individual viewers draw upon their own associations and memories, they

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<sup>394</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>395</sup> National Library of Australia, "Delicate Interactions," Catalogue Record, (2017), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/6330160?lookfor=delicate%20interactions%20herel&offset=1&max=2>.

undergo a personal journey of interpretation. They actively participate in the work. A poetic space is created.

Herel's naming of works is similarly open-ended. Titles engage with the aural and visual qualities of language. In the case of books such as *Delicate Interactions*, titles are not explicit, instead acting as what Anna Gray terms "poetic sound-words".<sup>396</sup> They mark the beginning of the individual interpretive journey. *Delicate Interactions*—the placement of these two words together demands enunciation in the sharp sounds of the 'd', 'cate', and 'inter'. The entire title is succinct—aesthetically and phonetically sharp. This sense of 'poetic sound-word' is evident viewing the embossed typeset on the front cover (Fig. 2c). Repeated letters, including French accents, are printed across the page. This repetition does not create any logical sentence, instead emphasising the visual and aural characteristics of each letter incrementally changed. *Delicate Interactions* emphasises the poetic image through the combination of the visual, aural and written in Herel's inclusion of *Criblemusicorimégraphoscopique*. The poem evokes a syllabic mouthful.

Herel's choice of poetry in this example also reflects a surreal ethos. Brennan was an Australian-born poet and scholar.<sup>397</sup> Classically inclined, his focus was upon "[establishing] some new kind of absolute," and after finding inspiration in French Symbolist poetry's focus on "spiritual pilgrimage."<sup>398</sup> Like the Surrealists and Herel, Brennan looked to address larger metaphysical questions outside the normal conventions of society. Mallarmé was a seminal figure in French symbolism.<sup>399</sup> He worked to present the reader with what he termed "*l'absente de tous bouquets*" ('the ideal flower that is absent from all real bouquets'), and was arguably a founding father of the poetic image.<sup>400</sup> Though Symbolism should be rightfully distinguished from Surrealism, they shared an interest in looking beyond the accepted norm to create a new reality. Herel has chosen poetry with similar goals to his own: challenging the complacent perspective.

During our first face-to-face meeting, Herel referenced *Delicate Interactions*. He spoke of the creation of a book in which there were no original prints.<sup>401</sup> He called it "quite exceptional", and referenced the innovation of the approach when the project was first

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<sup>396</sup> Anne Gray, *Petr Herel: an Exhibition of Artists Books at the National Library of Australia 22 March-30 June 1989* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1989), 10.

<sup>397</sup> Axel Clark, "Brennan, Christopher John (1870-1932)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University), accessed April 30, 2017, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brennan-christopher-john-5345/text9037>.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Charles Chadwick, "Stéphane Mallarmé," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, August 13, 2007, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stephane-Mallarme>.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

conceived (at first, unsuccessfully) in 1998.<sup>402</sup> He was “pleased [to be] able to make a ‘document’, [a] ‘document of a book’ ”.<sup>403</sup> It is a book the artist considers successful in subverting the genre, emphasising the value of the poetic image as portrayed in an unsuspecting and subtly innovative manner.

### *The Exquisite Corpse*

In their embrace of automatism and subversion of previous academic approaches to creativity, the Surrealists came to invent a game called *cadavre exquis* (‘exquisite cadaver’ or ‘exquisite corpse’).<sup>404</sup> Examining the game’s parameters, effect upon players, and links to erotica demonstrates the value of interpreting Herel’s work in relation to the exquisite corpse. Indeed, Herel’s artists’ books can be analysed as an exquisite corpse in both macrocosm and microcosm. Exquisite corpse was a parlour game in which players would each draw a part of an image in secret, fold the paper to hide most of this image from the other participants, and hand it on to the next for their contribution.<sup>405</sup> The result was an often confusing, illogical composite figure or phrase. The term was coined following an early game that resulted in the phrase: *le cadaver exquis boira le vin nouveau* (‘the exquisite corpse will drink the new wine’).<sup>406</sup> It was nonsensical, and embodied surreal goals of disruption and destabilisation.<sup>407</sup> Collaboration was key, as the creation of the final composite required different minds.<sup>408</sup> Aragon’s writing describes the exquisite corpse using phrases such as ‘an extraordinary displacement’ and ‘a surprising disproportion’, referencing the small-scale revolution being played out upon a single piece of paper.

The exquisite corpse influenced those creating the discombobulated figure as well as those interpreting it. It was uncanny, uncomfortable, and unsettling. By creating an exquisite corpse, players were further opening themselves to the possibility of the subverted object. An exquisite corpse visually represented the disruption of preconceived ideas of the image.<sup>409</sup> It challenged the viewer to associate forms they previously would not have

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> “Nude: Cadavre Exquis with Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Morise, Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitzky),” *Museum of Modern Art*, 2016, [http://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/max-ernst-levade-the-fugitive](http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/max-ernst-levade-the-fugitive).

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> As the Museum of Modern Art extrapolates: “Exquisite Corpse was a perfect parlour game, involving elements of unpredictability, chance, unseen elements, and group collaboration—all in service of disrupting the waking mind’s penchant for order”.

Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Volker Kahmen, *Erotic Art Today* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1972), 66.

<sup>409</sup> Balakian expands: “a more total creativity occurs when an attempt is made at virtual fabrication of new objects, and thereafter objects intermingle in an atmosphere all their own, governed by new laws of



naturally combined. This malleability generated a new freedom of association and understanding—one that was infinite. One small parlour game subsequently became a larger metaphor for the Surrealist way of life and creative process.<sup>410</sup> By interpreting the exquisite corpse, by simply being exposed to it, both the artist and the viewer were required to challenge preconceived ideas of order, form and meaning.

Herel's artist book practice can be considered as an expansion of the collaborative exquisite corpse, from word game to a play with book form. Challenging conventional approaches to the book and reading, both the creation and interpretation of the artist's book is a collaborative undertaking for the viewer as they interact with Herel's personally favoured texts and respective visual responses. Breton described Ernst's collage work as multifaceted, labyrinthine creations from the one mind.<sup>411</sup> Herel's work can be newly analysed as a space of collaboration—a meeting of literary, visual and personal sources from both artist and viewer.

The process of using the concept of the exquisite corpse to analyse Herel's work can be approached in a number of ways. Firstly, his books are an aberrant amalgamation in their entirety as object—their combination of language and image, codex and art. Secondly, Herel's work can be interpreted as the result of an internal collaboration of references from literature and poetry in combination with the artist's own imagery. Herel speaks of his current practice as welcoming collaborative projects with writers and poets.<sup>412</sup> Finally, the exquisite corpse is relevant to formal analysis of the erotic creatures populating the artist's imagery. Herel's work is the embodiment of an exquisite corpse in a profoundly multifaceted manner, and applying the concept to his work is essential to its analysis. It is both an exquisite corpse in the joining of various imagery and text during creation, and when viewing the combination once complete. Significantly, the effects of engaging with an exquisite corpse contribute to the overarching feeling of an aberrant object. This complex aberrance is evident when analysing *La Peau du Fantôme = Phantom Skin* of 1987 over an

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perspective, and against a new visual horizon. The most evolved forms of Surrealist art are concerned with such metaphysical objects and their space-horizon in what would seem to be a nonoxygen atmosphere".

Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (London: Unwin Books, 1972), 193.

<sup>410</sup> As Tanguy questioned: "what do we find in this domain of pure form...here where a ball of feathers weighs as much as a ball of lead, where all living things can fly and burrow with equal ease, where the most hostile elements meet and confront each other without catastrophic results...what shall we seek and what do we find?"

André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1972), 44.

<sup>411</sup> Breton wrote of Ernst's work: "it was a sort of jigsaw puzzle of creation: the pieces were all incredibly separated from each other, and since they no longer experienced any mutual magnetization they were seeking to discover new affinities for themselves".

André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1972), 24.

<sup>412</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

extended period. The unassuming viewer is confronted with an unusual composition of text and image on the page. This instils an uncomfortable and disconcerting sense of the uncanny, as celebrated by the Surrealists during their original play.

Specifically examining the marriage of language and image, *La Peau* features concertina-folded paper that layers the textual and the visual. Opening the book, I encounter a thin, waxy sheet, printed with an unidentifiable image that covers the poetry underneath (Fig. 3a). I either have to read through this translucent top layer, or unfold the entire book and peel the sheet back to see the text more clearly. Herel has included the original French version of the poem and an English translation. Considering depth, the work is a complex exquisite corpse, as it layers different languages, and I can burrow into and through the pages rather than just across them. Literally multilayered, *La Peau* is an exquisite corpse that stretches directionally and dimensionally.

*La Peau* also contains a visual representation of the exquisite corpse, referencing the iteration of the game that requires players to each draw a body segment, not knowing what those before and after will contribute to the image. In this work, Herel creates an aberrant form on his own. Indeed, there is an aberrant creature living within this aberrant object. This inner creature is a shock—it is held within a book at first glance non-threatening, with a familiar laid paper cover, softly textured deckle edge paper, and printing press watermark. In the revelatory act of an opening, I can consider each of the four parts of the concertina featuring the creature before combining them. On the first page, I am able to distinguish a pair of legs (Fig. 3a). They appear both scaled and hairy at the same, with individual follicles detaching themselves from the creature's skin and floating in the surrounding space. This being has four sharp claws at the end of each thick, stumpy leg. It appears to be covered with alchemical symbols. On the second page, I can distinguish a head-like form (Fig. 3b). It has eyes on stalks, growing from a deformed skull. It continues to grow hair from its scales. Its facial structure, its fundamental bone structure, remains unclear—it has several orifices, but are they mouths or eyes or ears, or something else entirely? Over on the next page, I am confronted with the end of the creature (Fig. 3c). It has a thick, slug-like tail, caught in the middle of a lumbering sway.

Once the concertina is folded out and the creature can be seen in its entirety, other details are apparent (Fig. 3d). The creature's body does appear to be tattooed in signs and symbols. These look cosmological, cartographical, and hieroglyphic. The crosses printed across the torso evoke a dermatological gravesite. This is an image within an image—a landscape within a portrait. The creature's neck appears to have stitches lacing through the

skin, and what were before feelers could now also be tusks. The small lines floating around the creature create a sense of movement, of shedding. Overall, the monster projects a sense of unsettling physicality—it could be described with words like sucking, scratching, stroking; crawling, clawing, caressing, burrowing and flaking, and phrases such as dropping hairs and shedding skin. This creature is simultaneously biological and fantastic, and visibly manifests the uncanny through its slightly familiar yet unclassifiable appearance.

The physicality of this unrecognisable creature infects me. There is a corporeal response, a tingling of skin. I can feel the stitches pulling; envision the slug-like trail of slime left behind this monster as it moves. The waxiness and yellowed pallor of the translucent paper begin to feel as though I am handling skin myself. Herel chose vellum for the thin, printed top layer. The paper becomes part of the exquisite corpse. The physicality of the book, the folds of the concertina, gives the creature an uncomfortably realistic sense of movement.

Interpreting this literal exquisite corpse, combined with the marriage of art object and book and image and text, I am left with many questions. *La Peau du Fantôme*—who is the phantom? Is the phantom the creature, the viewer, the poet or the artist? Is the book the phantom? Can phantoms have skin? These questions remain in their original, open-ended state as they valuably demonstrate the perpetual questioning prompted by Herel's work. There is no final, concrete answer; only a need for more methods of analysis. *La Peau du Fantôme* = *Phantom Skin* exemplifies the relationship between Herel's books and the exquisite corpse. Ironically playing with surreal concepts, Herel has made an exquisite corpse of Surrealism itself. In self-collaborating, referencing the dream state using uncanny creatures, and choosing to join particular words with particular images and particular composition, Herel has chopped up various ideas from the movement. He has stitched these various ideas together to make his own approach. Herel further subverts the surreal subversion.

### *The Erotic*

Using surreal concepts to analyse Herel's work also provides an opportunity to discuss the significance of eroticism in the artist's books.<sup>413</sup> Following the implied sexual tones of the exquisite corpse, this sense of the erotic comprises the use of sensual imagery, iconography, and composition. Internal and external imagery of the female body greatly contribute to a sense of perversion and fetish. Herel's work embodies all of these qualities, and

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<sup>413</sup> Finkelstein observes: "Breton asserts that beyond their obvious dissimilarities, all works considered as Surrealist have in common primarily an erotic implication".

Haim Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 67.

subsequently aligns with erotic aspects of the surreal paradigm. Furthermore, his work can be linked to the fetishization of objects—the surreal *objet à fonctionnement symbolique*. Herel creates art objects that emphasise the inherent erotic qualities of the book and the sensuous act of interpreting it. The artist's work contains both overt and subtle erotic references. This depth will be explored by first examining overt symbolism, then considering subtler nuances and stretching ideas of the sensual encounter to experiences with the physical, everyday object. Fetishization significantly reiterates the overarching argument of the artist's book as aberrant object.

Erotic art can be defined as the result of a 'sensual impulse', which embodies the fantasies, fetishes and desires of its creator.<sup>414</sup> This statement is clearly applicable to Surrealist art, and reflects the goal of the subjective communication of desire through art. The artist makes a highly personal statement in embracing eroticism, reflecting sexual impulse and fetish. This further aligns with the surreal goal of subverting past dogma in art. By creating erotic art, the Surrealist artist was representing a greater social freedom in being able to be expressive in a way that challenged preconceived ideas of propriety and taste.<sup>415</sup> Eroticism represented total freedom. By embracing the erotic potential of work and the sensuous corners of their minds, the Surrealists contradicted previous, prudish attitudes. They acknowledged the previous inability for eroticism to survive in the daylight, and strove to engage with an authentic inner consciousness—perversions, fetishes, and all.<sup>416</sup>

Herel's visually erotic vocabulary, his overtly sexual imagery and symbols, is evident when analysing the ten etchings that make up *Borges Sequel* of 1982.<sup>417</sup> *Borges Sequel* engages with an obvious distinction between the naked and the nude, the contortion of the female body, symbolism of the limb in isolation, and imagery of decay. In these prints, Herel plays with typical erotic signifiers, contorting the traditional erotic forms of nose, foot, hand and fingers, and the use of totem-like and keyhole shapes. This erotic lexicon suggests an erotic

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<sup>414</sup> Kahmen expatiates: "a sensual impulse drives the artist to work, urging him to achieve his best: his reward is originality...The artist painted the picture because he had to: for him it is an expression of his most intimate fantasies, his desires, his lust. In the visual arts these pictures generally represent the most personal statement the artist has ever made".

Haim Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 7-8.

<sup>415</sup> Volker Kahmen, *Erotic Art Today* (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1972), 9.

As Lucie-Smith expands: "erotic imagery has thus become an important weapon in the battle for modernism. It is not merely that artists seem to be expressing a fear of normal sexuality...it is also that the audience itself is to be assaulted".

Edward Lucie-Smith, *Eroticism in Western Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 162.

<sup>416</sup> Harold Rosenberg, *Art on the Edge: Creators and Situations* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc.), 220.

<sup>417</sup> While some may identify this collection of prints as a portfolio rather than a book, I argue its format still plays with the codex form, and can be likened to many Herel works that are unbound and collected together within a cover. Australian Galleries, who represent the artist in Australia, also identify the work as an artist's book.

"Petr Herel" (Australian Galleries, 2016),

[https://australiangalleries.com.au/app/uploads/2016/01/HEREL\\_CV16.pdf](https://australiangalleries.com.au/app/uploads/2016/01/HEREL_CV16.pdf).

dreamscape without rules—uncomfortable, unsettling, unpredictable, and undeniably surreal.

The comparison of naked and nude is not new, but has not been discussed in relation to the eroticism of Herel's prints. To be nude implies a sense of propriety and taste, relating back to historical antiquity and a celebration of the human form. In contrast with a sense of power and elegance, to be naked is to be exposed. It provokes feelings of a body that is unprotected, vulnerable.<sup>418</sup> The erotic imagery of *Borges Sequel* features figures that are certainly naked. Analysing particular bodies within the book supports this argument—consider, for example, the creature inhabiting the bottom left corner of the seventh page (Fig. 4a). This figure comprises a pair of split female legs, through which snakes a penis. The phallus then rests in a pair of cupped hands. This anonymous body does not include a head, but is instead defined by its split limbs. The openness of these legs, which appear to defy reality with their 180 degree split, conjures a sense of uncomfortable vulnerability. The body is laid bare to the viewer, caught in an intensely exposed position. No measures have been taken by Herel to give this figure a sense of dignity or subtlety—it is naked and blatantly erotic. The creatures that crawl across the other pages of *Borges Sequel* are similarly overtly sexual.

Analysing the nakedness present throughout *Borges Sequel* presents an opportunity to explore the theme of female distortion in Herel's work. This book features a variety of contorted female forms. One of the first etchings in the series includes a female body set alight (Fig. 4b). Her arms are raised in a *pirouette*; feet arched *en pointe*—a sacrificial *prima ballerina*. The body evokes the image of a witch burning at the stake. Flames engulf this woman's breasts and vagina—those elements that immediately suggest her femininity—as if she is being punished for her gender. Significantly, her face is entirely covered by licking tendrils: in her anonymity, she is a larger metaphor for all women. Even if this woman survived, she would be forever defaced.

Continuing this female distortion is a pyramid comprising female anatomy on page two (Fig. 4c). Resting in the bottom right corner of the plate, the pyramid is composed of ten squares. Each of these squares is made of human flesh. This flesh is a woman's, as the viewer can conclude from the vagina that sits within the most central compartment. At each bottom corner of the triangle there is a single foot, and two of the higher squares

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<sup>418</sup> For more on comparing the naked and the nude, see Kenneth Clark's seminal 1953 text: *The Nude: a Study in Ideal Form*.

Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton: NJ Princeton University Press, 1953).

feature eyelash-framed eyes. In this pyramid, the female form has been reduced to an interpretation of its essential parts. It has been physically carved to pieces, with the amputated components glued back together to create an entirely different form, still identifiably female. This creature, another exquisite corpse, is unattractive and confronting. It demands the viewer question their definition of femininity—whether it is an essentially biological term, or related to a larger sense of identity that has been intentionally stripped from this shape.

Perhaps the most obvious distortion of the female form is in Herel's rendering of Venus (Fig. 4d). In Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* of 1484-86, Venus stands within a large clamshell, hands and hair gently covering her breasts and genitals (Fig. 5). She stands *contrapposto*, her skin smooth, with long red hair softly blowing in the breeze. She is the epitome of the nude beauty. Herel's Venus acts in complete opposition to this depiction. The Venus of Herel's page is a contorted figure. Her body has been fused to the shell on which she once stood, its hard frills growing out from the skin of her torso. She is naked. Herel has not given her arms to cover herself, instead making her hairless vagina the focal point. The figure's legs have been encased within tight-fitting fishnet stockings, her generous thighs bulging at their fastenings. This Venus is not standing *contrapposto*; instead her legs are apart, in forced exposure. Her feet are pointed, in a frozen position of never-ending discomfort. Most importantly, like Herel's female forms before it, this Venus has been rendered anonymous. Instead of a face, a long-stemmed neck extends from her torso, complete with beak-like eye in place of a face. In his reinterpretation of Venus, Herel is making clear an active distortion of the female body—the artist has taken the epitome of allegorical beauty and stretched her to an extreme that incites discomfort with her exaggerated, naked eroticism.

Volker Kahmen's concept of the 'limb in isolation' as an erotic signifier is relevant to Herel's figures.<sup>419</sup> Herel has taken familiar body parts and contorted them to a new, uncomfortably sexual extreme. An example of this within *Borges Sequel* can be found on page three, which features two pairs of split, dancing legs (Fig. 4e). These legs are separate from any body, instead seeking balance by each resting one foot on the ground. The other points high up into the air, as if caught in an exaggerated, dance-like movement. At the centre of each of these isolated pairs of limbs is an opening, framed by long, dark hairs. At first glance, these holes appear to be eyes. However, considering the etching from another angle, these eyes may represent vaginal openings. Rather than considering the image face-on, one may be looking up from below. The isolation of these limbs renders them

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<sup>419</sup> Haim Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 71.

somewhat ambiguous. The viewer might be seeing eyeball, yet they might be seeing genital. The viewer might be seeing eyelash, yet they might be seeing pubic hair. The viewer might be seeing waterline, yet they might be seeing vaginal lip. Whether tear duct or clitoris, each pair is reaching out—almost touching, in a tense, dancing twirl. In choosing to depict the isolated limb, Herel's work might be contextualised to a larger art historical pattern. His point of difference is engaging with the isolated limb by bestowing it a malleable and ambiguous erotic duality.

Herel further extends the limb in isolation by depicting what this thesis newly terms the 'isolated orifice'. On page two of *Borges Sequel*, above the edition inscription, is an enigmatic shape (Fig. 4f). This form floats alone, not clearly connected to the rest of the imagery on the paper. This shape is not an accidental result of foul biting or scratches on the plate—the artist has placed it here with intent. Upon closer inspection, this form might be interpreted as a lone orifice. The shape has a puckered centre, a wrinkled opening. Considering it contextually as part of the highly erotic *Borges Sequel* series, this is a justifiable interpretation. The isolated orifice is a continuation of Herel's uncomfortable eroticism.

*Borges Sequel* is rife with a sense of decay, communicated through the lingering presence of particular imagery. This aesthetic is, again, expressed both explicitly and implicitly. Overtly, Herel creates figures that appear in a state of rot. On page two of the series, the centre image is one of a human-like figure whose head rests on the ground, joined to its torso only by a stretching length of folded skin (Fig. 4g). These twists suggest that in becoming detached, the head spun as it fell to the floor. That marks where all romantic or cinematic associations end. The creature's back has begun to rot, its spinal cord and internal organs straining against skin. Its jaw has been lost underneath the skin flap, though it may never have existed. The creature's right eye has begun to droop, and its eyes look in opposite directions.

This is a figure in a state of disrepair, one of slow and painful decay. The decomposition appears to continue as I watch. This image, though overt in its sense of breakdown, is also subtle. This is primarily achieved through Herel's depiction of body hair. The creature's legs are covered in a prickly down. However, one leg is more thickly carpeted than its partner. This has presumably occurred due to a shedding process. The short, fine lines that drift around the creature's bottom half are those hairs that have already fallen out—floating follicles. Varying parts of this creature are beginning to fall apart in varying degrees of obviousness.

Finally, Herel depicts more conventional erotic signifiers of the nose, ear, foot, hand and finger in his prints. *Borges Sequel* also features typically erotic keyhole and totemic shapes. Yet these symbols are not applied simply, instead used in a complex manner typical of Herel's subversion of the subverted. In many of his prints, the artist combines several of these signifiers within the one figure. On the same page as his exquisite Venus corpse, Herel has etched another discombobulated figure. It is a head without body, resting instead on a large foot (Fig. 4h). From this foot extends a large hand, with fingers sticking into the creature's nostril, ear and eyes. This penetration appears to connect the head to its podiatric base. In this wholly bizarre combination of body parts, Herel emphasises the nose, ear, foot, hand and fingers. Furthermore, by depicting the hand with finger inserted in nose, ear and eyes, Herel dynamically expresses a sense of movement. I imagine the action of finger entering orifice, continuing on to a vision of the lumbering, uncomfortable way in which this creature might negotiate space. The erotic is not only present in the static two-dimensional image, but the possibility of its three-dimensional movement.

Herel also intertwines erotically symbolism with the totemic, or pillar, form. The fourth page of *Borges Sequel* demonstrates this combination. At the bottom of the print are nine exquisite corpse-like creatures (Fig. 4i). They have a strong sense of geometry, with their bodies twisted to create triangular and rectangular silhouettes. The far left being is triangular, its three limbs joined at each end. The next is a bizarre rectangle, with one half of the creature joined by head and hand to create the shape. These creatures are formulaic in their presentation, a stack of figures overturned, lined up horizontally in a manner reminiscent of the gods that circle vases of Ancient Greece, or those in each separated scene of the Ramayana. They are demented, venerable beings. By looking at them, the viewer worships the aberrant.

Finally, *Borges Sequel* features the use of the keyhole symbol on its fifth page (Fig. 4j). The form is created out of negative space, its shape cut away from an otherwise circular block of script-like, imaginary text.<sup>420</sup> Placed in the centre of the page, the middle of the keyhole becomes the focal point. The symbolism is inherently erotic—the shape appears yonic, echoing a simplified vagina. It portrays an opening, both physically and metaphysically. Herel's use of keyhole shape is in keeping with his erotic undertones throughout the book, and indeed throughout the rest of his artist book oeuvre.

Considering the combination of these erotic aspects, and Herel's reinterpretation of historic erotic imagery, interrogates the very nature of eroticism. Demonstrated by the

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<sup>420</sup> Herel's unique text will be discussed at length in Chapter Four.



images in *Borges Sequel*, eroticism is not necessarily about pleasure. It is also about discomfort. Stimulated by these erotic prints, I experience confusion. The eroticism in Herel's books is not an attempt at immediate pleasure and gratification, rather a confronting interrogation of propriety, experimenting with explicit eroticism to the point of aberrance. The general shock of the erotic celebrated by Surrealism is a platform from which Herel moves to explore his personally unpredictable and uncomfortable dreamscape.

The surreal concepts of *le merveilleux sexuel* and *l'objet à fonctionnement symbolique* are crucial to the analysis of Herel's books. They encourage a specific exploration of the fetishization of objects, and especially those of the everyday. Coined by the French essayist Raymond Jean, *le merveilleux sexuel* ('the sexual marvellous') can be defined as "the Surrealist tendency to project desire on things and beings...thus, everything may serve as a vehicle for sexual fantasy—sexuality is in the eye of the beholder".<sup>421</sup> This idea of a sexual vehicle relates closely to the choice of the book as medium: Herel attributes a sensual aura to an object habitually overlooked. Considering the book as a fantastical, phantasmatic, and erotic object, it becomes what Dalí considered *l'objet à fonctionnement symbolique* ('an object with symbolic function').<sup>422</sup> The humble book embodies a powerful erotic symbolism. Experiencing it, interpreting it, is an act of indulgence.

This sensual experience of *le merveilleux sexuel* and *l'objet à fonctionnement symbolique* is suggestive of sacredness. This sense of reverence is difficult to translate into words, thus adding to the symbolic object's mystique—the book's mystique. As Finkelstein writes, "the pleasure extracted from acting upon, or operating, the object, is unexplainable, though basically related to sexual fantasies and desires, translated metaphorically and objectified".<sup>423</sup> Eroticism in art recalls past times during which Lucie-Smith posits, "the erotic and the sacred were inextricably fused with one another".<sup>424</sup> The erotic had not yet been clouded with social shyness, propriety and privatisation—the Ancient Greeks, for example, did not demonstrate any remarkable aversion to nudity and sexual acts.<sup>425</sup> The 'sexual morality' governing much contemporary thought, argued to be the result of Judeo-Christian influence, was not yet of concern.<sup>426</sup> Thus, the experience of *Borges Sequel's* eroticism harks back to a primitive and quintessential acceptance, even celebration, of sensuality and pleasure. In this case, the viewer takes on the role of the voyeur, a figure

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<sup>421</sup> Haim Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 68.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Edward Lucie-Smith, *Eroticism in Western Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 11.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 197.

characterised by the gratification they experience through watching or seeing.<sup>427</sup> However the book facilitates an additional dimension to this satisfaction—the added experience of participation. This participation is not overtly sexual, but subtly creates a feeling of the sexual and sensual in the act of reading, viewing, and feeling paper between fingertips. The artist’s book as an *objet à fonctionnement symbolique* presents the unique opportunity to expand voyeurism to an interaction with book as sensual art object.

### *Outsider Art*

Considering the aberrant, liminal place of the artist’s book within art historical discourse, examining Herel’s work in relation to Outsider Art is both relevant and fruitful. This comparison has not before been made in relation to Herel’s oeuvre. Roger Cardinal first used the term in 1972, after Jean Dubuffet’s articulation of ‘*Art Brut*’ in the 1940s.<sup>428</sup> Dubuffet found himself inspired by Surrealism’s interest in the everyday experience and the embrace of the unconscious.<sup>429</sup> Outsider Art engages, like Herel, with subject matter that is metaphysical—art that interrogates reality, mixing mindscape and dreamscape together with no sense of hierarchy.<sup>430</sup> Outsider artists could be those without any formal training or even those with mental illness, engaging with the visuals in their minds without any fidelity to artistic movements or academic rules. In the 1970s and 1980s, to be considered ‘other’ was an umbrella term—to be of a different cultural group or ethnicity, to be mentally unstable, to be self-taught, and in some cases, to be a woman or child.<sup>431</sup> To embrace Outsider Art was to embrace work that did not fit comfortably in the canon or on the market.<sup>432</sup>

Outsider Art probes an interrogation of reception directly relevant to the interpretation of Herel’s work. Writing on its uncomfortable place within art history mirrors the argument proposed by this thesis of the artist’s book as aberrant object. Cardinal observes: “somehow the mere phrase ‘Outsider Art’ seems to stimulate an expenditure of nervous

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>428</sup> Colin Rhodes, *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 7.

<sup>429</sup> Dubuffet believed “the conscious mind mediated our perception, erecting a repressive barrier between reality and our experience”.

Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>431</sup> Roger Cardinal, “Introduction” in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture* ed. Michael D. Hall et al. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), xii.

<sup>432</sup> Lippard interrogates this label, asking: “these artists are ‘outside’ of what? Their own social contexts? Sometimes. The mainstream? Usually. In fact, these people, like some of the best artists who function within the art world, are really insiders. They are outcasts only because those who live in their head tend to be ignored in a society that primarily decorates the pocket and the outer self”.

Lucy Lippard, “Crossing into Uncommon Grounds,” in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture* ed. Michael D. Hall et al. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 5.

energy”.<sup>433</sup> To look at the work *Crucified* (1990) by Nick Blinko is to be confronted with a highly detailed chaos. Featuring an overwhelmingly intricate background of crosshatched segments, the painting presents the pained crucifixion of a thin, wizened creature (Fig. 6). His mouth is a gaping hole with no clear outline, making the rest of his face appear as if it is sinking into darkness. His eye sockets are shadowed wells, and his stomach is literally an open door with another human-esque creature incubating inside. Blinko is directly interacting with the dark imagery of the human psyche. Though hospitalised for mental illness prior to making this image, Blinko chose to forego medical assistance and focus on art.<sup>434</sup> Colin Rhodes explains:

These pictures are produced in periods when he was not taking medication, bringing no respite from the psychic torment and delusions from which he suffers.

In order to make art, Blinko risks “total psychological exposure.”<sup>435</sup>

*Crucified* is confronting as it was created by an Outsider artist in a period of intense mental instability, expressed by the dark atmosphere and obsessive detail of the work. Being confronted with imagery that does not align with any standard conventions, or lend itself to any obvious discussion, is challenging. Constance Perin observes “viewing works of art whose references are obscure, we cannot be sure of what their makers intended to convey of their experience”.<sup>436</sup> It is not easy to find a starting point from which to begin their interpretation or analysis, much like there is a point of pause when handling Herel’s work for the first time, or later attempting to articulate it in writing.

Outsider Art, like the artist’s book, demands the interpreter acknowledge and challenge the influence of habitual viewing.<sup>437</sup> Perin works to articulate the experience of approaching an aberrant artwork or object:

Every experience of novelty and ambiguity challenges our abilities to make it meaningful. Until we do, we are unsure of how to act and of what to expect. Until we are sure, we experience unease, tension, anxiety, fear, sometimes panic. Our

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<sup>433</sup> Roger Cardinal, “Toward an Outsider Aesthetic,” in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture* ed. Michael D. Hall et al. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 21.

<sup>434</sup> Rhodes, op cit., 121.

<sup>435</sup> Colin Rhodes, *Outsider Art: Spontaneous Alternatives* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 89.

<sup>436</sup> Constance Perin, “The Reception of New, Unusual and Difficult Art,” in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture* ed. Michael D. Hall et al. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 173.

<sup>437</sup> Constance Perin notes that this prospect “can be unwelcome”.  
Ibid., 174-175.

ability to tolerate ambiguity is singularly limited, yet so is our capacity to find meanings.<sup>438</sup>

Outsider Art and the artist's book are without a prescribed interpretive framework. Once this initial barrier is broken, through acknowledgement and reflection, interpretation can lead down a fruitful labyrinthine course.

The study of Outsider Art is especially relevant to Herel's practice as the artist identifies *La Halle Saint Pierre* (previously the *Le Musée d'Art Naïf—Max Fourny* or *Musée d'Art Brut & Art Singulier*) as a site of inspiration during his time in Paris.<sup>439</sup> This information can be used to contextualise Herel's artist book practice in a new manner that clearly engages with uncomfortable material. *La Halle Saint Pierre* exhibits work identified as *brut*, *outsider*, and *singulier*—created by artists on the fringes.<sup>440</sup> To enter the lower exhibition space, I must first walk through a thick curtain.<sup>441</sup> Black walls, ceiling and floor make the space particularly dark. The curtained entryway acts as a physical threshold marking a move from light to dark. While my eyes are adjusting, I begin to observe the curatorial layout: the space is open plan, frequented by free-floating walls. Sculpture, painting, drawing and print are mixed together throughout the display. The darkness of the room requires me to move unusually close to inspect works. This closeness heightens the sense of discomfort as I realise the subject matter I am observing. This includes images of the mutilated human body, the surreal exquisite corpse, sexual fetishism and grotesque fantasy. I am led to experience a corporeal response to the work, presented with pieces depicting hair and skin, vomit and other fluids. Works are heavily textured and tactile, contributing to this uncomfortable physicality. Examining several of the sculptures, paintings, and prints included in *La Halle Saint Pierre*'s collection contextualises Herel's aesthetic in a new space, where the confrontationally aberrant is not only celebrated, but the curatorial focus.

This lower, darkened space of *La Halle Saint Pierre* features work from Outsider artists such as Hans Bellmer, Murielle Belin and Joel-Peter Witkin. Bellmer (1902-1975) was a German sculptor and photographer working in France.<sup>442</sup> During the 1930s he worked on his most recognised series *La Poupée* (The Doll), involving a female model dummy comprising many interchangeable, interlocking limbs and body parts (Fig. 7).<sup>443</sup> His photographs document a

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>439</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2016.

<sup>440</sup> "Halle Saint Pierre: Art Brut/Art Outsider/Art Singulier," 2017, <http://www.hallesaintpierre.org/>.

<sup>441</sup> Observations of this institution were noted in August 2016.

<sup>442</sup> "Hans Bellmer," *Union List of Artist Names Online* (Getty Research Institute, 2017), [http://www.getty.edu/vow/ULANFullDisplay?find=&role=&nation=&prev\\_page=1&subjectid=500018770](http://www.getty.edu/vow/ULANFullDisplay?find=&role=&nation=&prev_page=1&subjectid=500018770).

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

malleable woman—a changing exquisite corpse, naked and exposed, dismembered and decapitated. Mythological creatures and bestiaries inspire Belin’s work (1976-).<sup>444</sup> Featured in the space are forms from her sculptural taxidermy series *Sculptures Empaillées* (2007-2012). The creatures’ familiar texture, scale and anatomy create a feeling of uncanny valley when noting their human-like faces (Fig. 8). Belin has created a series of exquisite corpses that are subtler than Bellmer’s fragmented women, yet still disquieting in the cohesiveness of their own aberrant composition. Continuing with this theme of the exquisite corpse are the photographs of American photographer Witkin (1939-), who creates still life compositions that feature objects such as slashed human faces and dead flowers amongst traditional Dutch still life fixtures such as fruit and flowing material (Fig. 9). By stitching together traditional ideals of beauty with grotesque Surrealism, Witkin mixes genre in a style that creates discomfort through contrast.

The exhibition space also contains work by Stani Nitkowski and Zoran Mušič. Nitkowski (1949-2001) was a French artist whose paintings and prints heavily feature contorted human figures. His prevalent colour palette mixes dark browns, deep red and yellowed green to create overwhelmingly eerie imagery (Fig. 10). The artist’s slashing, diagonal brushstrokes mimic the violence of his often flurried, ambiguous subject matter. Mušič (1909-2005) grew up in regional Slovenia, and spent the later part of his life in Paris.<sup>445</sup> His paintings of concentration camp scenes present the human body reduced to a part of the natural landscape (Fig. 11). Bodies pile on top of each other, individuals made anonymous by the masses of limbs. His portraits feature blurred figures, depicting expressions of pain yet denying the ability to connect with the subject as an individual.

A brief exploration of some of the artists included in the *La Halle Saint Pierre* collection innovatively contributes to an understanding of Herel’s work and the discussion of what it is to be aberrant ‘other’. Previous literature on Outsider Art places emphasis upon those who create work with no training, often under the strain of mental illness. Yet the artists at *La Halle Saint Pierre*, many of them with formal training and no mentioned history of institutionalisation, share a grotesque aesthetic that has seen them labelled as outside the popular narrative. The majority of these artists come from a European background, and worked during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. *La Halle Saint Pierre* demonstrates that Outsider Art is a fluid genre that continues into the contemporary, and Herel’s work can be contextualised as an exploration of the aberrant ‘other’.

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<sup>444</sup> Last Rites Gallery, “Murielle Belin,” 2017, <http://www.lastritesgallery.com/murielle-belin/>.

<sup>445</sup> Tate, “Zoran Mušič 1909-2005,” accessed December 3, 2017, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/zoran-music-1685>.

Examining Herel's artist book practice through a surreal lens contributes to a new understanding of the aberrant artist's book. Surrealism's active subversion of habitual interpretation provides a foundation from which to interrogate the artist's book in a plethora of new ways. Engaging with Herel's books in relation to ideas of the relationship between image and text, the everyday object, and the marvellous demonstrates the artist's book demand for reassessment. The artist's book is a sensual, tactile object that creates a larger poetic space during interpretation. Accrediting value to such subjective interpretation, and anecdotal material, is necessary to analyse the poetic presence of work that further engages with ideas of the exquisite corpse, the erotic and Outsider Art. The analysis of Herel's subversive artist book practice demonstrably benefits from considering it through a surreal lens.

## Chapter Four

### On Viewing Words

A visual examination of the textual presence in Herel's books reiterates the artist's book as complex, aberrant object—this text conveys meaning without being conventionally read. Using the methodological framework of semiology for such analysis might be unexpected, considering its focus on the communication of semantic meaning. Certainly, using a semiological lens to emphasise not the semantic significance of text but its visual impact is an innovative approach. Ideas rooted in semiology including positivism, the relationship between text and context, and the polysemy of meaning can all be applied in a new manner to analyse the text in Herel's books. Notably, Herel's use of different languages demonstrates the expansive potential of this aesthetic analysis of language—familiar alphabets, unfamiliar alphabets, and, in the case of this polyglot artist, unknowable alphabets. Herel's use of English (familiar), Czech (presumed unfamiliar), and his own unique characters demand the articulation and exploration of a new, aesthetically oriented analysis of language.<sup>446</sup> I propose a new iteration of semiotics inspired by Herel's aberrant work that generates a visual meaning from text. This approach not only strengthens the argument of artist's book as aberrant object, but also provides a framework to critically engage with such material.

The application of semiotics to the formal analysis of art objects is a complex process that challenges traditional semiotic theory. Previously, semiotics has worked to uncover positivistic knowledge according to an agreed relationship between three key components: sign, system, and context.<sup>447</sup> For founding theorists Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), semiotics presented a rigidly structuralist approach to verbal linguistics.<sup>448</sup> Language was analysed using a methodical, scientific model—particular signs working together to form semantic understanding. It is this attitude of scientific positivism that has previously made the application of semiotics to visual material an awkward one.<sup>449</sup> This kind of scientific rigidity proves to be counterproductive in the

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<sup>446</sup> I acknowledge that not every reader will find the same languages familiar and unfamiliar, but this Anglophone perspective can easily be extended to apply to those with different linguistic backgrounds.

<sup>447</sup> David Crow, *Visible Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics in the Visual Arts* (Lausanne: AVA Publishing SA, 2010), 14.

<sup>448</sup> Fernande Saint-Martin, *Semiotics of Visual Language* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>449</sup> Saint-Martin comments, "the determination of the basic elements of visual language has been...the stumbling block in the construction of a visual semiotics".

*Ibid.*, 2.

discussion of subjective creation, as demonstrated by previous attempts to reduce works of art down to key ‘visual variables’.<sup>450</sup>

The artist’s book demands a reassessment of the semiotic preoccupation with ‘cracking the code’ in art history, especially in those works including text. Historic examples of ‘success’ from semantic translation in linguistics, such as the solution of the Rosetta Stone and Linear B, focus on their original significance as official, social documents, and do not expand to acknowledge the visual impact of the texts.<sup>451</sup> Inscribed with a message written in hieroglyphics, demotic, and Greek, the Rosetta Stone is celebrated as a key cipher in the modern understanding of ancient Egyptian culture and language.<sup>452</sup> The decipherment of Linear B is similarly celebrated for the information it communicates about ancient social orders and society.<sup>453</sup> As the conventional book is overlooked as an everyday object, so too have these examples been primarily valued for the information they communicate. In these two cases, absolution (a feeling of completion or understanding) is achieved by semantic solution. Herel’s use of untranslatable signs, and the combined languages that form an aesthetic presence in his work, question the very nature of ‘understanding’ text in art history. Herel presents a case study of work involving text and language that does not aim to be semantically comprehensible. Instead, Herel’s books defy previous semiotic fixation by codifying both semantic and visual language, and demand a new iteration of visually based sign analysis.<sup>454</sup>

Studying Herel’s self-created language emphasises the conventional preoccupation with positive knowledge, the relationship between text and context and the polysemy of meaning. It is through analysing this language I argue that Herel’s work is an exemplary case for extracting meaning through the visual qualities of text. With starry letterforms that dynamically move across the page, Herel’s work proposes a visual reading of text.

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<sup>450</sup> Though acknowledging the problems of systematic analysis when applying semiotics to visual art, Saint-Martin then continues to attempt to create an ultimate list of key visual elements. These elements, including the likes of ‘coloreme’ (deemed the basic unit of visual language; the focal point), ‘chromatic poles’, and ‘vectorality’ already reflect focuses of formal analysis and create an exclusive, esoteric, and unwelcoming vocabulary.

Fernande Saint-Martin, *Semiotics of Visual Language* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>451</sup> Ian Verstegen agrees that “there is nothing wrong with semiotics but rather the ways in which semiotics is habitually discussed”.

Ian Verstegen, “Reforming Visual Semiotics: The Dynamic Approach,” *Semiotics* 200 (2014): 31.

<sup>452</sup> “The Rosetta Stone,” *The British Museum*, 2017,

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=117631&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=117631&partId=1).

<sup>453</sup> Jeremy B. Rutter, “The Linear B Tablets and Mycenaean Social, Political, and Economic Organization,” *Aegean Prehistoric Archaeology*, 2017, [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~prehistory/aegean/?page\\_id=659](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~prehistory/aegean/?page_id=659).

<sup>454</sup> Prague linguist Jan Mukařovský uses this term frequently in his essay *The Essence of Visual Arts*.

Jan Mukařovský, “The Essence of Visual Arts,” in *Semiotics of Art*, eds. Ladislav Matějka and Irwin R. Titunik (Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1976), 258.



Appearing in many of his artists' books, his own language is made up of entirely nonsensical forms, linguistically speaking. Sasha Grishin writes of these letterforms as having "the appearance of a graphic language, a mystical calligraphy which is not immediately decipherable to the uninitiated eye".<sup>455</sup> Here, Grishin's 'uninitiated eye' is one that does not consider the aesthetic impact of Herel's semantically ambiguous language. A necessary change in perspective can be framed through the paradigm of reception theory within semiotics.

The beginnings of a non-semantic, visual response to text-based art can arguably be traced to the creation of, and response to, concrete poetry. Building popularity in the 1950s, concrete poetry presented visual poems—poems to be viewed and read.<sup>456</sup> Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Poster Poem (Le Circus)* of 1964 is a visually dynamic textual work (Fig. 1). Fonts change size and colour, mimicking the twirling shades of a big top tent. Red, blue, black and exclamation mark conjure images of the cartoon-like ring man shouting at his crowd. The word 'hoop' is enclosed within a bouncing circle, its circular letters themselves becoming buoyant through their framing. Choosing to disregard semantic reading, this poem is self-contained—it finds purpose in itself, and does not subscribe to habitual interpretation or a greater need to understand the semantic meaning of the text. Concrete poetry presents words with a visual presence and literary meaning, organised with great care upon the page. As the artist's book makes the interpreter aware of the book in hand, the visual poem makes them aware of the eyes in their head.

### *Text and Context*

The relationship between text and context in semiotics challenges the interpretation of text in the artist's book and reiterates the artist's book as aberrant object. In their seminal publication *Semiotics and Art History* (1991), Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson interrogate the impact context has upon text, and whether the two are as distinct as traditional semiotics would suggest:

...the context in which the work of art is placed is in fact being generated out of the work itself...In cases of this kind, elements of visual text migrate from text to context and back, but recognition of such circulation is prevented by the primary cut of text-stroke-context.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> Sasha Grishin, *Petr Herel: Písmo Duše: A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 5.

<sup>456</sup> Gary Catalano, *The Bandaged Image: a Study of Australian Artists' Books* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983), 14.

<sup>457</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 73 (1991): 178 -179.

In the case of Herel's work, this blurring of text and context provides a foundational vocabulary to express the artist's book's aberrance. When one holds any book in their hands, they enter an agreement of sorts with those who created it, whether writer, designer, or publisher. The assumed promise of the book is a promise of the traditional, standard codex: pages, formatting, the inclusion of language with semantic meaning understood through the act of reading. The standard book carries what Mieke and Bal refer to as 'connotational baggage'—we interact with a familiar object in a familiar manner.<sup>458</sup> However, upon opening one of Herel's artists' books, this clear-cut context becomes confused. The book in this case is instead an art object with visual meaning, and the expected communication through text is sometimes present but often not. In the viewer's hands, Herel's artists' books generate their own context due to the open-ended possibilities of individual interpretation. Each viewer brings with them their own personal context, before creating another unique context in the moment of interaction with the book, resulting in a multiplicitous interpretive environment. The artist's book brings the two polarised ideas of text and context closer together, as the subjective viewer is in control of how they interact with the object.

Further analysis of *Fragments d'une Première Version d'Aurélia* (1994) demonstrates the artist's book's engagement with connotational baggage. The combination of handwriting and presumed unfamiliar French language in the book lends itself to analysis that is visual rather than literal. Approaching the text and handwriting conventionally, the assumption might be made that the words on the page should be read, should communicate semantically. However, the use of unfamiliar language and illegibility of the personal scrawl in *Fragments* do not facilitate this anticipated literal reading. This opens the viewer to the possibility of a visual interpretation. Rather than deeming the work inaccessible due to the inability to understand the semantic meaning of the text, the visual analysis of language proposes another innovative way for each viewer to engage with the book.

Handwriting as a graphic form is used throughout Herel's artist book oeuvre, and the artist himself re-writes poems multiple times in an act of personal investigation before including them in his work.<sup>459</sup> Alex Selenitsch comments:

Not only is a transcriber closer to the origins of the poem than the reader of a printed version, but transcription provides one continuum of mark making from word to picture.<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 73 (1991): 178 -180.

<sup>459</sup> Alex Selenitsch, "Petr Herel: Stasis and Vector," in *Convergent Worlds*, ed. N. Sever (Canberra: ANU Drill Hall Gallery, 2012), 31-32.

In his act of writing, Herel transforms the read word into a visual mark on the page, thus demonstrating the need for a formal analysis, a visually semiotic approach, to the symbols in his work. *Fragments* demonstrates this return from semantic text back to the visual mark.

At first glance, *Fragments* appears an unlikely choice to exemplify the visual qualities of words on the page. The first page features little text (Fig. 2a). The title is typed in small, conservative black font. It is unusually spaced, with a comparatively large gap between the words ‘*première*’ and ‘*version*’. My eyes have to jump over this void, which joins the rest of the page to create a large portion of negative space. This gap destabilises the writing, now floating amongst white emptiness rather than anchored safely to the page. Despite being capitalised, the buoyant letters appear unsure of themselves, precariously placed in sequence, ready to fly off page edge. In this case, the connotational baggage of the book suggests a semantic reading, yet when I acknowledge the habitual influence of this approach I am able to question its authority. Even an atypical beginning such as that of *Fragments* can present an opportunity for aesthetic analysis. This introductory exercise demands my eyes work hard to override conventional, complacent reading.

The next page of *Fragments* featuring text is equally rich with analytical possibility. The title is typed again, this time italicised (Fig. 2b). The diagonal tilt creates a sense of line that runs off the page again. In this book, text is not confined to the page. The word ‘*Aurélia*’ is printed in a mossy green, tying the textual form with the green labyrinth stamp and ‘LABYRINTH PRESS’ printed text at the bottom of the page. This unifying green ink creates another diagonal itself, running in a slant matching that of the italicised text above. Focussing on the diagonals of the page, there is yet another—four small lines of text framing the labyrinth stamp. The stamp is one central form surrounded by four others, balanced and slanted at the same time. This page, comprised primarily of text, is overwhelmingly visual.

The following page of *Fragments* features text shaped in two columns (Fig. 2c). Like the title page, is a traditional, seriffed font. The visual interpretation here is to be found in its composition. The page’s layout is reminiscent of a newspaper article. The two defined columns mirror those read in print journalism.<sup>461</sup> These shapes present a feeling of the

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Borges describes pages of a magical book viewed by the narrator in *The Book of Sand* (1975) as “...laid out in double columns, as in a Bible”. Borges’ impact upon Herel’s work will be discussed later in this chapter and at length in Chapter Five.

Jorge Luis Borges, “The Book of Sand,” in *The Book of Sand* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 88.

formal, of the factual, of the accurate and true.<sup>462</sup> Text composed in this shape is surely the result of research, if I choose to rest upon a habitual approach to reading. Herel has subtly demonstrated the great power of the visual—the influence of shape and form upon text regardless of literal content. Herel demands I make meaning through a visual translation.

*Fragments* contains not just a written translation of de Nerval's text but the original manuscript itself. Having practiced non-literal viewing over the previous pages, my eye is able to consider the blotted ink on this one (Fig. 2d). A thick pool of black seeps to the left, and areas where de Nerval crossed out text for rewriting evoke depth. Texture is emphasised by the imagined grooves the dark handwriting made on the original page, teasingly present on this smooth copy. The agitated lines outlining the original manuscript create a frame, emphasising the intimate nature of the handwriting by forming a protective wall or barrier: a safety net. Handwriting is innately personal, and can be considered a reflection of personality. Handwriting can be messy, scrawled, sprawling and illegible. It provides a rich foothold in the visual interpretation of text.<sup>463</sup> The illegibly written language becomes image.

The artist includes another page of original manuscript—in this instance, de Nerval has scratched out the majority of his text (Fig. 2e). Herel has obviously not chosen this script for its legibility. The remaining, untouched text is composed of shapes that are consistent and contained. These quick flicks of ink on the page are in contrast with the eliminating lines, which move in irregular patterns. The jagged line in the middle of the page again presents a textured depth in creating a darker segment of the textual form. Along with the wobbling single lines, it contributes to the feeling of form continuing off the page and into the space around it. The awareness of this creative space, the translation of the force behind conception and physical creation into the moving text, demonstrates the poetic experience of Herel's artists' books. Fuelled by this 'poetic intuition', I "[seek]...not only to assimilate all known forms but also boldly to create new forms...to be in a position to embrace all the structures of the world, manifested or not".<sup>464</sup> Poetry is not limited to a semantic system, and can extend forth into a visual one. This page has not been composed semantically, but visually.

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<sup>462</sup> Or, in the case of propaganda or biased writing, text that is intentionally formatted to appear factual, rather than being factual itself.

<sup>463</sup> Tietz writes: "when the construction of a developed mental representation is thwarted...viewing can come into play". When one chooses not to fall into semantic reading habits, they open themselves up to aesthetic analysis.

Ward Tietz, "Artists' Books: Between Viewing and Reading," *Journal of Artists' Books* 21 (2007): 21.

<sup>464</sup> Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 304.

The final page of de Nerval's original manuscript contains noticeably less writing (Fig. 2f). A small paragraph rests at the top of the page, followed by a majority of negative space. This negative space gives me the opportunity to find a focal point in a small, circular form that simultaneously marks the end of the text and the middle of the page. This form, printed in the same black ink, appears to be a stamp. It is featured throughout the text, however in its central placement here becomes a significant feature of the page. This stamp's circular form emphasises the short, snappy lines of the preceding text. In comparison to the stamp's oval, the usually round shapes to be found in the alphabet—the likes of 'o', 'p', 'a'—reveal themselves to be aesthetically angular and sharp. This not only reiterates the individual nature of handwriting but the value of visual interpretation in working to override traditional methods of analysing text.

After pages of handwritten and newsprint-formatted text, Herel has inserted two prints into the book. The first is presented on translucent paper (Fig. 2g). The blue form, resembling a stretched arch, floats to the centre right of the page. It is hazy and ambiguous, perhaps a geometric shape or a living creature from deep in the sea. It might be covered with a soft layer of material, or a skin of growing bacteria. This form appears overwhelmingly organic. My previous visually oriented reading of text in this book can be used to inform the analysis of this image. The thicker line to the left of the form is reminiscent of the luscious patches of blotted ink in the manuscript. The smaller, circular shapes covering the being might be the circular forms previous, angular letters were missing. Perhaps these shapes are unfinished letters themselves. Negative space frames the tubular forms. Placed next to traditionally typed text, the creature's presence is enigmatic. Thinking instead of the individual forms of previous handwriting, the mass can be considered a visual continuation of subjective meaning. Like the handwriting before it, it is not necessary for this creature be conventionally understood.

The second print in *Fragments* features a hunched, despondent figure, partly visible through the translucent page of the previous image (Fig. 2h). This print is in direct contrast with the floating, blue form on the page before it, much like the contrast between typeset text and blotted handwriting. The figure on this page is linear, angular, and dark. Comprising recognisable forms rendered unrecognisable, it reflects Herel's preoccupation with the surreal exquisite corpse and subsequent interrogation of reality.<sup>465</sup> With obvious feet, calves and thighs, the figure then features baby bird-like wings and a drooping, bulbous neck and head. It desperately crawls across a barren landscape; the horizon marked by a single running line reminiscent of de Nerval's own editing marks. Just as considering the visual

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<sup>465</sup> For further analysis of Herel's work in relation to Surrealism, see Chapter Three.

qualities of text is a confusing and difficult process, so is attempting to understand this figure. Though nonsensical, it exists. Though text might be unreadable, it still holds meaning. By confronting these new realities expressed in Herel's work, I stretch suddenly malleable boundaries of interpretation. Not only are there visual qualities to be found in text itself, this analysis can then be applied to inform that of accompanying imagery. By choosing to present these prints with this particular text, Herel's practice justifies the need for a new interpretive methodology addressing the visual qualities of textual forms.

### *The Polysemy of Meaning*

Reassessing the rigidity of traditional semiotics and applying a more flexible analysis to the artist's book demonstrates the array of possibilities facilitated by accepting the polysemy of meaning of an aesthetic, non-semantic interpretation of text.<sup>466</sup> Visual semiotics is a dynamic field when removed from the conventional, "theoretical immobility of sign systems".<sup>467</sup> Such an approach directly contrasts historical focus upon systematically valid responses, and supports an experiential analysis of Herel's work. Rather than a fixed format of response, the viewer should instead consider the "plurality of contexts" when interacting with Herel's work: the possibility of a unique interaction for each viewer, the culmination of interlaced interactions between art object and human hand, artist and viewer, and between book, viewer, and environment.<sup>468</sup> This suggests the concept Bal and Bryson refer to as 'the traffic of meaning'—a phenomenon in which meaning fluidly oscillates between object, viewer, and environment.<sup>469</sup>

Interacting with one of Herel's books through a paradigm of visual semiotics, I am not attempting to traditionally 'crack' or solve any code, but instead am able to reflect upon the act of interpretation itself. Accepting the polysemy of meaning present in Herel's work is a self-conscious and referential act. Herel's text based work sits in a *perpetuum mobile*, in which meaning is generated through the individual interpreter.<sup>470</sup> It is innately subjective. Visual semiotics presents an open methodology that appropriately matches Herel's revelation of book as artistic medium.

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<sup>466</sup> Bal and Bryson coin this term in their 1991 article *Semiotics and Art History*.

Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *The Art Bulletin* 73 (1991): 174.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 179.

Verstegen also encourages a fluid semiotic approach: "[we] need not jettison semiotics because it can only deal with one kind of meaning—conventional meaning. Instead, adopting the dynamic approach to semiotics promises to overcome the semiotic/non-semiotic distinction".

Ian Verstegen, "Reforming Visual Semiotics: The Dynamic Approach," *Semiotics* 200 (2014): 46.

<sup>469</sup> Bal and Bryson, op cit., 203.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

Herel's work presents words on the page that, considering them visually rather than semantically, are not words in the traditional sense at all. Roland Barthes' writing on American symbolist painter Cy Twombly (1928-2011) is arguably analogous to this proposed methodology. Not only does Barthes create an informed subjective response to Twombly's work, he also addresses challenges associated with a non-semantic interpretation of text.<sup>471</sup> Like Twombly, Herel creates work that 'alludes to writing', as will be particularly evident during later analysis of his unique text forms.<sup>472</sup> To analyse these letterforms is to realise that Herel's work actively encourages the notion of language as gesture: "neither a form nor a usage but only a gesture, the gesture which produces it by permitting it to linger: a blur, almost a blotch, a negligence".<sup>473</sup> The word negligence here is particularly provocative.

Herel's words obfuscate meaning, but this is not an esoteric act of exclusivity. Instead, it requires the viewer to interrogate conventional, passive analysis. Text may immediately suggest itself, but meaning does not. Visually, Herel's text forms become symbols that deny clear interpretation, acting in the very face of rigid semiotic analysis. The semantic is abstracted to the visual, often unknowable. Meaning is implied and yet, at the same time, denied. Herel demands his viewer make meaning through alternative paths, participating in the continuous, cyclical *perpetuum mobile*. This permits the very questioning of what it is to make meaning. A formal analysis of Herel's language considers the visual weight of his letterforms, rather than seeking a literal understanding.

The graphic presence of writing needs to be reassessed as a phenomenon that is gestural, figurative, and visual. There is a need to "consider languages and scripts as circumstances".<sup>474</sup> Language can be used in a manner that is not explicit and clear. Contemporary graphologist Colette Sirat sets precedence for the study of the formal qualities of text and page—shape, style, form, and composition.<sup>475</sup> Researching handwriting in Mediterranean and Western culture, Sirat analyses the changes to style over time. This kind of visual approach can be used as a foundational pillar from which to expand to the analysis of the myriad languages used by Herel in his work. Sirat's palaeographic paradigm is still largely focussed on the communication of semantic meaning, and her writing has a

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<sup>471</sup> Barthes asks open-ended questions applicable to the study of Herel's work: "what is it he [Cy Twombly] does? And what are we to call what he does?"

Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms* (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1985), 157.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Colette Sirat, *Writing as Handwork: A History of Handwriting in Mediterranean and Western Culture*, ed. L. Schramm (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 13.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

scientific tone. However, her interest in the composition of the page can be innovatively extended to analyse the visual meaning of Herel's pages using subjective methodologies.

Aside from Sirat, other examples in literature do begin to reference the visual capabilities of text. Ideas of a 'conceptual blending' of visual and textual attempt to create a term for the concept, yet such terminology has not perforated contemporary art history.<sup>476</sup> Letters are celebrated for their typographic qualities, their participation in decorating a text, yet are not analysed as visual forms in their own right—instead, always in relation to the semantic. In his seminal text *Bookworks Revisited* (1979), not only did Ulises Carrión (1941-1989) coin the term 'bookwork' but also referred to a reading of rhythm within objects containing both text and image.<sup>477</sup> Much of the conceptual artist's writing poses questions with continuing relevance to the study of Herel's work, querying through what kind of lens one might 'read' a bookwork, and whether one should employ literary or art criticism. Carrión begins to answer his own questions when he writes: "The bookwork derives much of its power from its existence on the threshold of two worlds".<sup>478</sup> Herel's work powerfully presents language as between two worlds too—the semantic and the visual.

Much can be learnt, here, from art-historical studies of medieval manuscripts. Medieval art and the art of the book were inextricably tied.<sup>479</sup> The manuscripts created during this period not only spread sacred messages, but also did so as an expression of individual craftsmanship and style.<sup>480</sup> Language was pictorially dynamic, with specific conventions such as decorated letters and arabesque borders fusing literature and art together as one.<sup>481</sup> Considering one of these manuscripts, Meyer Schapiro notes a possible discrepancy to be found between script and image, "a difference between reading and viewing".<sup>482</sup> Schapiro continues to leave this as an issue for the reader rather than the artist creating the work, and does not expand.<sup>483</sup> Nevertheless, the art historian does note that both image and text together communicate a message, and by fusing together in this manner they each enter a new realm of communication.<sup>484</sup> In the case of visual semiotics, image is considered another method of communication and text can be considered visually.

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<sup>476</sup> Phil Jones, "The Book as a Tunnel," in *The Open Book Project* (Michigan: Eastern Michigan University Galleries, 2014), 123.

<sup>477</sup> Ward Tietz, "Artists' Books: Between Viewing and Reading," *Journal of Artists' Books* 21 (2007): 20.

<sup>478</sup> Jae Rossman, "Reading Outside the Lines: Paratextual Analysis and Artists' Books," *Journal of Artists' Books* 23 (2008): 31.

<sup>479</sup> Meyer Schapiro, *Words, Script, and Pictures: Semiotics of Visual Language* (New York: George Braziller, 1996), 117.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 181.



The Glasgow University Library holds a late fifteenth century French Book of Hours known as the *Glasgow Hours*. This illuminated manuscript exemplifies the visual nature of language during the medieval period. Featuring twelve miniatures depicting the story of Christmas, the pages containing text are overwhelmingly decorative. Consider the page featuring the adoration of the magi, whose focal point is arguably shared between the image and distinctive capital ‘D’ (Fig. 3). The space within this letter has been filled with foliate forms mimicking those that fill the rest of the page. While the remaining text is black, this decorative letter is coloured with bright red, orange, blue and green. It is framed by an ornate rectangle that fits close to the letter’s form. While this letter is contributing to a semantic message, it undoubtedly contributes to the page visually as well. It complements the other decorative shapes and the image itself, with the blue of the letter matching that of Mary’s robe, and the green that of the decorative wallpaper on the wall behind her. In this sense the literal words are explicitly tied to the illustrated visual, and blur the separation of image and text.

Such a lens can also be applied to Islamic manuscripts, with the discussion of the visual qualities of Islamic calligraphy warranting dedicated study in its own right. Calligraphy is a continuing key element of Islamic art, communicating fundamental spiritual messages of the Qur’an.<sup>485</sup> Though still functioning as a vehicle of semantic meaning, Islamic calligraphy is often highly decorative and ornamental.<sup>486</sup> Manuscripts and texts were historically creative endeavours featuring “an interplay of decorative elements”: text, arabesque, vegetal patterns and framing.<sup>487</sup> Undoubtedly visual, they present the opportunity for formal analysis. This demonstrates the ability to extend a method inspired by Herel’s work to the analysis of other text-based examples.

Consider the imagery of a double page spread from the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *Album of Calligraphies Including Poetry and Prophetic Traditions (Hadith)*, ca. 1500, by Ottoman calligrapher Shaikh Hamdullah ibn Mustafa Dede (Fig. 4). A marbled mixing of blue and orange, pale pink and teal frame the central text. The arrangement of colour on the topmost page is reminiscent of a dusky sunset over green landscape, whereas the bottom colours take the form of psychedelic flowers. Script is written on the diagonal, interrupted by web-like symbols. For a work described as ‘non-illustrated’, this manuscript

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<sup>485</sup> “Calligraphy in Islamic art,” Department of Islamic Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified October 2001, [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cali/hd\\_cali.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cali/hd_cali.htm).

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

demonstrates a considered application of colour, line and composition.<sup>488</sup> It should also be noted that if this alphabet is unfamiliar to the viewer, it is perhaps easier to view the calligraphy as a visual form. Nevertheless, this change in attitude towards analysing text can be applied to a variety of other examples.

While the formal analysis of illuminated manuscripts and Islamic manuscripts demonstrates the visual qualities of language, it is not entirely analogous to the study of Herel's text. Importantly, the visual richness of these scripts on the page enhances semantic meaning rather than obfuscating it. There is not a conscious effort being made to interrogate the very nature of text and meaning, rather a devotion to making words communicate significant messages that are appropriately beautiful. The decoration of these scripts is an act of devotion towards semantic meaning—a celebration of the message they convey. Literature that focuses on such scripts demonstrates the beginnings of a vocabulary to discuss the form of letters, but also the need for an extension of this method to analyse works that have no interest in clear communication. The image aspect of Herel's texts seems to make their meaning more elusive.

### *Unfamiliar Language*

Herel's choice to include language presumed unfamiliar in his books presents the opportunity to consider sentences, words, and the alphabet for their visual qualities. Faced with a language that is unknown to them, the viewer must adjust to the aberrance of the unknown and work to find another method of interpretation. This process is demonstrated by the analysis of the 1996 work *Psalms*. When first handling *Psalms*, the book's dimensions are reminiscent of a reporter's notebook, stretching tall and slim in the hand (Fig. 5a). According to the introduction on the inside cover, the book contains '150 hymns, laments, liturgies and wisdom poems' from the Hebrew bible. Accordingly, Herel includes both English and Hebrew text throughout its pages. In creating this work, the artist has not only experimented with a language unfamiliar to us but also unfamiliar to him, entirely removing the relevance of a semantic interpretation of the Hebrew. *Psalms* demonstrates Herel's play with the visual of the literal.

The two languages included in *Psalms* are presented together over a double page spread as a mirror image (Fig. 5b-c). While it may be initially tempting to seek familiar shapes in the unfamiliar Hebrew—the last two characters of the title vaguely resemble an English 'w'—

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<sup>488</sup> This 'non-illustrated' label may come from the distinct lack of human or animal forms, reflecting Islamic attitudes towards idolatry. For more information, see: Oliver Leaman, *Islamic Aesthetics: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

this does not take advantage of Herel's choice of the unfamiliar. The Hebrew shapes are simultaneously fluid and boxy. Their lines oscillate between thick and thin, creating a languid rhythm. The space between each word is almost identical both across and down the page, creating a cohesive form that seems weighted and heavy on the page. The main portion of text, the primary three lines, has a pyramidal composition—a direct inverse of the English on the mirrored page.

Presented alongside Hebrew, the English forms seem jagged. They take up more space on the page, and their capitalisation suggests authority and importance—strong shapes. The soft and fluid visuals of the previous page are contrasted with this sharp harshness. Though the presence of English may appear to act in the face of a visual interpretation of text, the contrast of Hebrew and English here reveals the tendency to fall back on familiar, semantic behaviours of reading. By laying the two languages adjacent to each other, Herel exposes the tension between revealed and hidden meaning. Together, the two languages, known and unknown, work to expose a contributing factor to the aberrance of the artist's book. The semantic meaning of the Hebrew is not the key element, and is even made largely irrelevant, encouraging a valid visual interpretation of the text instead.

The consideration of conventional reading directions also has a visual impact. Hebrew is traditionally composed right to left, and English left to right. By arranging the languages side-by-side, Herel presents them as originating from the same central point. The linear forms emanate outward from the book's central bindings. The composition of each page is weighted towards the centre, remaining inextricably tied to the liminal middle space between Hebrew and English, formal and semantic. Even the page numbers rest only centimetres away from each other due to the inverted margins. I must lean into the page as I focus on a densely populated area of multiple texts. This central focus leaves a large portion of the page to negative space, and the emphasised margins of the text on each page create new forms themselves. The Hebrew juts out in an arrowhead form, while the English slides down in the beginnings of a leisurely slope. A simple semantic reading of these texts would not present the opportunity to explore the visual qualities, leading to discussion as to the relationship between languages.

The formal analysis of this English/Hebrew spread reveals that Herel has deliberately used directional reading to create a visual pattern, texts mirroring each other along the central axis at the binding. The artist draws out the act of reading as a visual play in composition. I am compelled to look at the text rather than read it, thus validating the need to acknowledge the visual presence and weight of Herel's chosen texts. As made evident by

the text in *Psalms*, the artist's conscious decision to include both familiar and unfamiliar languages has significant implications for the reception of the book as art object. This is a book that demands to be looked at, rather than conventionally read.

### *Familiar Language*

Herel further challenges the traditional, semantic interpretation of text by presenting it as unfinished. *Delicate Interactions* of 2013, by Christopher Brennan, Petr Herel and Stéphane Mallarmé, is a reworking of the latter's seminal poem *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*. The book contains pages of poetry visually resemblant of a musical composition (Fig. 6a-d). The writing on the page has been edited by hand with red and blue pen. This annotative presence, this editing mark, leads the text to aesthetically resemble a draft—as if the poem is still under construction. In fact, this book is an offset reproduction of an unfinished work intended for publication in 1998 at the Graphic Investigation Workshop, Canberra.<sup>489</sup> While the initially intended book did not eventuate, Herel compiled the mock-up pages into this work, published fifteen years later.<sup>490</sup> *Delicate Interactions* is simultaneously finished and unfinished. It challenges the general notion that a published book, a finished book, should appear polished.

Herel's choice of this annotated format encourages a consideration of the influence a polished aesthetic has upon first impressions of art and writing. Pages twenty-four and twenty-five of *Delicate Interactions* contain a faint blue grid with text that does not appear to be following standard linguistic conventions or a feasible pattern (Fig. 6e). The poetry has been split into sections, and winds its way down and across the pages. Instead of conventional lines, the text is presented like a musical composition. The words framed within the blue grid appear like those contained within an exercise book. The font is small, serif, serious, its shapes restrained and formal. This is explicitly juxtaposed with the liberal swipes of red and blue pen annotating the poetry. The shapes of words, the lines of words, are further broken up by thick red lines seemingly retraced and dug into the paper. Next to these loud scarlet lines, the shapes of the words become a collection of small black lines themselves. The writing's composition resembles a join-the-dot game or a map trail. The black forms slip their way down the page as if carried by an invisible slide, forcing the eyes to flick to and fro, with no resting place. Again, if I were to conventionally read the text to understand, I would be denying myself the possibility for rich formal analysis. The artist's

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<sup>489</sup> National Library of Australia, "Delicate Interactions," Catalogue Record, (2017), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/6330160?lookfor=delicate%20interactions%20herel&offset=1&max=2>.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

book is an art object. As is the case with *Delicate Interactions*, its visual qualities need to be examined.

Again, Barthes' writing can be used to support the visual reading of text in Herel's books. Rather than presenting a clear message, the artist presents marks that reference gesture and movement. As Barthes asks:

What is a gesture? Something like the surplus of an action. The action is transitive, it seeks only to provoke an object, a result; the gesture is the indeterminate and inexhaustible total of reasons, pulsions, indolences which surround the action with an atmosphere...<sup>491</sup>

Barthes gives precedence to analysis of the significance of gesture despite the presence of plainly communicated meaning. Herel's version of *Un Coup de Dés* is not a simple representation of the original poem but a re-presentation. He re-presents the lines as not only deconstructed compositionally, in homage to Mallarmé's original typographic layout, but with an added element of editor's mark. With the simplest of editing lines, carets, and commentary, Herel visually manifests the gestures of reading, writing, and thinking. As is the case with standard editing, these annotations may only make clear sense to the formally trained, yet there is meaning to be found in this denial of meaning for everyone else—the act of not presenting meaning is, indeed, meaningful. Applying a formal analysis to text-based works like Herel's forces us to interrogate the very promise of communication within a book.

The text included throughout *Delicate Interactions* encourages the formal analysis of composition and balance. Across pages thirty-four and thirty-five, the layout becomes significantly heavier with text and editor's marks (Fig. 6f). The composition of the page is busy, with no clear focal point. The rhythmic line of diagonal text on the left hand page turns words into the shapes of a moving conveyor belt or staircase. This overarching sense of dynamic movement is highlighted by the abundance of negative space surrounding the busy centre. By creating a sense of emptiness around the text, this negative space emphasises the text's very forms. Red pen interrupts the refined, shrinking letters with unwavering line and bright, contrasting colour. By placing explicit mark next to printed text, Herel reduces words back into the graphic marks that make them. Barthes speaks of Twombly as deconstructing writing through his 'loitering' on the page.<sup>492</sup> As demonstrated by these pages, Herel is conducting his own exploration of this breakdown of traditional

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<sup>491</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms* (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1985), 160.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 161.

meaning making. The artist destroys the hierarchy between draft and final product by presenting the editing mark alongside the written line. All marks on the page are of equal meaning, participating in their own new ‘graphic code’.<sup>493</sup>

### *Unknowable Language*

Writing on reception in semiotics has acknowledged the interpretation of a sign as inextricably linked to the person engaging with it. Peirce wrote of the “creative process of exchange between the sign and the reader”.<sup>494</sup> When interacting with a sign or sign system, the interpreter brings with them past understanding, learning and associations. Specifically regarding semiotics and the reception of art, Umberto Eco (1932-2016) posits each interpreter has an individual reaction and interpretation to stimulus.<sup>495</sup> Though writing mainly on musical compositions, Eco’s words can be applied to the subjective analysis possible during the visual interpretation of text.

Such subjectivity is necessary for examining Herel’s constructed language, which acts in the face of concrete semantic understanding. Eco writes “the informal sign does not mark the death of form in the visual arts, but proposes instead...a field of possibilities. The gestural marks and spatters...stimulate the viewer to make their own connections with the work”.<sup>496</sup> Herel’s work not only stimulates subjective connections but by maintaining familiar formats of standard text also allows for reflection upon the act of reading itself. In this sense, Herel interrogates what it means to communicate and understand, and his language is not simply a message but a direct outcome of his personal exploration of meaning.<sup>497</sup> This again relates to the notion of book as art object—the book as not transporting meaning but containing meaning in itself. There is a sense of both immediacy and intimacy achieved by Herel sharing with the viewer a self-created visual text that is open to infinite interpretations. The work lies dormant until the interpreter interacts with it.

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> David Crow, *Visible Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics in the Visual Arts* (Lausanne: AVA Publishing SA, 2010), 52.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>497</sup> Eco also writes of a fusion between communicator and message in art, theorising “the marks are the signifier of the gesture but not a symbolic sign for the gesture. The mark does not merely stand for the action—it is the action. The gesture and the sign are fused together”. In this sense, Herel is breaking down the traditional relationship between writer and reader, creator and receiver, not using the book as a vessel but a message in itself.  
Ibid.

Herel acknowledges the inspiration his letterforms take from Max Ernst's book *Maximiliana or the Illegal Practice of Astronomy* (1964).<sup>498</sup> Ernst's letterforms simultaneously appear as crude tribal markings, astrological symbols, alien text and incomprehensible diagrams—his own composite language (Fig. 7a-c).<sup>499</sup> They are a visible representation of the unknown other, and Herel's own forms quote these cosmic shapes. *Maximiliana* also features a typographical concept invented by publisher Iliazd (1894-1975), "*la construction en carré*" ('construction in squares'), by which each of the letterforms in the book falls into an invisible geometric grid running over the page.<sup>500</sup> As will be demonstrated in the following analysis of *Borges Sequel* (1982), this is relevant to Herel's work as the artist himself experiments with presenting his own language using typical textual conventions. Writing of Ernst's letterforms, Anne Hyde Greet articulates:

The invisible design [spreads]... across the page and beyond the sky as we see it and also [references]... the mystical ideas of a cosmic structure—[it is] arbitrary, secret, and divine.<sup>501</sup>

The presentation of the unknowable in a deliberately conventional format creates an aberrant page as it feels so tantalisingly close to a semantic message, yet rests intentionally out of reach.<sup>502</sup> Both Herel and Ernst present viewers with a finished product that keeps secrets. The presence of these semantically untranslatable texts emphasises the conventional need to understand. These texts, intended to suggest semantic significance by their marked presence on the page and close resemblance to alphabetical characters, are loudly secretive. The artists have deliberately included them and deliberately left them unknown. They lend themselves to a visual examination to generate understanding.

Previous writing on Herel's work makes some reference to his letterforms, but does not undertake the necessary thorough analysis conducted here. Grishin describes Herel's organic language as 'scribblings of the soul', before finishing: "there are some things which

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<sup>498</sup> Max Ernst, *Maximiliana: The Illegal Practice of Astronomy: Hommage à Dorothea Tanning* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1974).

Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>499</sup> Hubert refers to Ernst's alphabet as comprised of 'ciphers', "...capable of expansion and above all of metamorphosis...defying the notion of finality".

Renee Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 31.

<sup>500</sup> Anne Hyde Greet, "Iliazd and Max Ernst: '65 Maximiliana or the Illegal Practice of Astronomy," *World Literature Today* 56 (1982): 10.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Hubert again writes of Ernst: "his system imposes no limits on what signs can be made available. The secret writing bridges the gap between a familiar and an unfamiliar world, between the visible and the invisible, composed as it is of signs that belong simultaneously to visual and verbal codes. The writing, which functions throughout as a visual sign, creates the momentary illusion that it is decipherable, that the letters or shapes may somehow yield a meaning". This directly relates to my argument of Herel knowingly presenting the unknowable, and that this choice does not deny interpretation but instead allows infinite iterations. Hubert, op cit., 313.

cannot be said with words, even if we have to invent a script with which to say them”.<sup>503</sup> This observation works as a useful springboard from which to interrogate how meaning is conveyed without words, and furthermore how meaning is conveyed with words. Resting in the liminal space between book and art object, the artist’s book is a prime environment in which to identify another liminal zone between image and text: “...a place for invention, for making specific and unique gestures”.<sup>504</sup> Long-time collaborator Thierry Bouchard wrote of Herel’s letterforms as ‘pictograms’—a language of the unknown, the displaced, of another world that still engages with our own.<sup>505</sup>

To contextualise Herel’s play with the aesthetics of text, and note analogous interpretive vocabulary, the artist’s treatment of language can be newly examined next to that of Paul Klee (1879-1940). Klee’s dancing letterforms are described as ‘peopling’ his imagery, suggesting a prioritisation of movement and dynamism of line as opposed to the communication of an explicitly literal message.<sup>506</sup> In the 1937 painting *Legend of the Nile*, Klee presents the viewer with a scene that challenges their distinction between symbol and form (Fig. 8). At the centre of the work rests a boat of rowers that float amongst a sea of alchemical characters. There are recognisable shapes within this water, a fish and a plant, but the rest are reminiscent of random mathematical symbols. The rowers move through an overwhelming sea of the unknown, the unexpected.

Rather than investigating the potential for these symbols to mean something concrete, their presence allows the eye to instead consider them as making a purely visual contribution. Above the boat, the symbols appear evenly spaced and are composed of straight lines. The forms below are cramped close together, the mix of straight and curving lines allowing the eye no immediate resting place or focal point. They interact with the shapes that fill the background of the work, sometimes aligning and at other times irregularly crossing over them. These symbols are explicitly present in the work, and yet evoke the unknown and unknowable at the same time. They simultaneously represent presence and absence. Analysing the work of Klee supports a new framework for interpreting Herel’s aberrant work and the text it contains. Klee does not depict a known language next to his made up forms, and does not present them in a conventionally literary manner, similar to Herel’s own manipulation of text.

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<sup>503</sup> Sasha Grishin, *Petr Herel: Písmo Duše: A Retrospective* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, 1999), 5, 34.

<sup>504</sup> Alex Selenitsch, “Petr Herel: Stasis and Vector,” in *Convergent Worlds*, ed. N. Sever (Canberra: ANU Drill Hall Gallery, 2012), 31.

<sup>505</sup> Thierry Bouchard and Petr Herel, *Petr Herel: Bibliothèque de Beaune, janvier-fevrier 1988, Livres d’Artiste & Livres Edités par Thierry Bouchard* (Beaune: Bibliothèque de Beaune, 1987), 10.

<sup>506</sup> Nicolette Gray, *Lettering as Drawing: The Moving Line* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 75.



The letterforms Herel has developed are partly a graphic manifestation of the influence Jorge Luis Borges' writing has had upon the artist's practice.<sup>507</sup> In the short story *The Immortal* (1947), the narrator observes a unique script he describes as the "letters in our dreams, [that] seem on the verge of being understood and then dissolve".<sup>508</sup> He notes the letters do not appear to form a cohesive code.<sup>509</sup> Instead, these symbols embody individual character, and are wholly visual due to their immediate semantic inaccessibility. Herel's forms reference this text as a visual response to reading this literary description, and magical text is a recurrent theme throughout Borges' oeuvre. As Herel engages with his new textual forms, he challenges the conventional reality of the reader. Like the challenge Herel's work presents for habitual reading, Borges too addresses the influence between text and feeling grounded or unstable, asserting: "a language is a tradition, a way of grasping reality, not an arbitrary assemblage of symbols".<sup>510</sup> Herel's own text, to be demonstrated by the analysis of the appropriately Borgesian inspired *Borges Sequel* (1982), presents a new reality and suggests a new way of grasping it. His letterforms are cosmological, hieroglyphic, alchemical, and ultimately alien forms. Herel's personal code, an untranslatable language, interrogates ideas of communication, reception and understanding, and encourages the analysis of text/context relationships, semantics, the polysemy of meaning, and the need for subjective response.

Many of the prints throughout *Borges Sequel* contain Herel's unique letterforms, making the book an exemplary case study for the impact of unknowable language upon interpretation. The first text I come across is demure compared to the larger exquisite corpses that surround it (Fig. 9a). It resembles a journal article in shape, reflecting the influence of standard convention in shaping interaction with a text. Not only is Herel playing with the familiar journalistic composition, he also plays with traditional features of text, emphasising their often overlooked visual form. On this page, lines, as might be found in a notebook, do not provide a resting point for the text. Herel's letterforms hover around these lines rather than on top of them. The lines here are not to order, to make neat the text, but instead dynamically become a part of the writing itself. The repetitive shapes of the forms

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<sup>507</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, 20 March, 2017.

<sup>508</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Immortal," in *Ficciones*, ed. Anthony Kerrigan (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1962), 142.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "The Gold of Tigers," in *The Book of Sand* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 98. In his preface to *The Unending Rose* (1975), Borges posits: "the word must have been in the beginning a magic symbol, which the usury of time wore out". In the poem entitled *Susana Bombal* (1970), the writer references a "magic alphabet". Herel's interest in a magical alphabet mirrors Borges' preoccupation.

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Unending Rose," in *The Book of Sand* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 100.

Jorge Luis Borges, "Susana Bombal," in *The Book of Sand* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 107.

themselves suggest a code, a pattern. They present as language, yet are unknowable both literarily and literally. Instead, Herel presents me with a language of visuals.

The visual possibilities of text are demonstrated throughout pages that follow. The second print sees the form of the text change as it runs in a long line across the large page (Fig. 9b). There is no break for my eyes. Herel has composed his letters so that the page line runs straight through them. This is neither a line of elimination, nor is it a guiding line. Shaken from its traditional, literary function, Herel tempts the line to interact with the text surrounding it. The letterforms themselves alternate with asterisk shapes, looping around in thin lines before becoming thick and diagonal. There is a sense of density, of weight, as the text begins thin and knotted, transforming to thin and sparsely articulated, before finishing dark and bubbling. Such writing demonstrates that just as an art historian formally analyses an artwork's visual elements of composition, line and texture, so too can they apply this vocabulary to the analysis of text.

Throughout *Borges Sequel*, Herel also interrogates common identifiers of meaning in text. On the same page as above, text forms run along the lines of recognisable arrow shapes (Fig. 9c). Arrows are diagrammatically used in conventional texts to label, identify, or illustrate a message. Yet on this page, these arrows achieve none of these tasks. There is no literal meaning here, only aesthetic. The arrow, an element whose aesthetic contribution is often overlooked, becomes a form that carries the weight of the letters resting upon it. These letters act as weighted load, perhaps working to slow the form down or power a violent release. Again, conducting a formal analysis such as this on Herel's lettering provides the viewer the opportunity to note the presence of movement and form, as well as question the very nature of interpreting text. The formal analysis of text in Herel's artist book practice both exposes aberrance and provides a framework with which to engage with it.

The visual analysis of Herel's text lends itself to an analysis of composition. On sheet three, the letterforms are composed in two lined columns (Fig. 9d). The left column is evenly spaced out, containing short, sharp flicks. There is a sense of balance and calm. In the right column letters are tight, small, and knotted. The lines on this side do not work to guide, but further cramp everything in and onto itself. This writing is corporeal, muscular, gestural, and biological. The large, irregular plot of negative space within this textual composition, featuring several larger, swooping characters, emphasises the state of anxiety above it. A long line from a dipping letter falls into this blank space. It presents a game of visual snakes and ladders, my eyes darting all over the text above before sliding down this

line and through a negative sea of space, before finding unstable grounding in the few letters floating about this space like islands. Here, text is not explaining mood but creating it.

The composition of Herel's letterforms in *Borges Sequel* reflects the artist's thematic interest in growth and decay.<sup>511</sup> Page five features a new textual form in the shape of a keyhole (Fig. 9e). This keyhole, constructed by layered text, gradually darkens. The letters begin delicate and spaciouly composed. However, the letters that form the keyhole shape are soon no longer dancing, instead layered thickly on top of another. I posit that this layering mirrors Herel's process of rewriting a text repeatedly before including it in a finished book.<sup>512</sup> Here, the written keyhole is a visual manifestation of this obsessive practice. Diagonal and swooping lines scramble over each other, becoming irreversibly knotted like the fine links of a bundled chain. These forms are frantic, resembling ants piling on top of each other in a fight for space. This keyhole form is not organising these letters, rather trapping them, starving them of space. Here it is most evident that these letters are not for literal consumption—they are impossible to read semantically. Not only are they untranslatable, the textual forms adopt the qualities of a living creature, as I am presented with a visual manifestation of a cycle between birth, growth and decay.

The characters' interaction with the negative space of this keyhole form further demonstrates their corporeal, living nature. The swarm of erratic characters outlines the hole in the centre of the form. Some letters escape from the mass enough to stick limbs into the empty space, creating a sense of texture. The white gap works to anchor the entire, swarming form into place, as does the density of the changing gradient. This sense of grounded weight is in contrast with the shapes at the bottom left hand corner of the print. Perhaps having escaped from the locked space above, these letterforms have grown large. It is easy to imagine them walking around with an exaggerated gait—thin, bending lines threatening to snap due to their delicacy. Together, these larger shapes form the feathers of a flying bird viewed from the perspective of a godly, omnipresent narrator. Herel demonstrates that, when freed from the necessity of a literal interpretation, letters and words can become dynamic forms that make a visual contribution to meaning.

Over the following sequence of pages in *Borges Sequel*, it becomes increasingly evident that Herel is experimenting with composition, form and the aesthetic characteristics of text

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<sup>511</sup> The artist wrote of his preoccupation with ideas of 'Growth' and 'Decay' (intentionally capitalised) in a 2017 letter.

Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, April 13, 2017.

<sup>512</sup> Alex Selenitsch, "Petr Herel: Stasis and Vector," in *Convergent Wolds*, ed. N. Sever (Canberra: ANU Drill Hall Gallery, 2012), 31.

using his invented visual language. On a later page, text acts as a containing border, buoyant with negative space (Fig. 9f). The letterforms stretch their arms out—they are letters with limbs. Though there is a sense of the individual presence of each form, they collectively form a linear frame. Herel's letters on this page are cruciform, but do not cross each other to form knots as seen on other pages. Instead, these lines cleanly intersect one another. They all feature a slight diagonal slant, giving the impression they are blowing in the same breeze. The text's visual qualities evoke a calm mood through this uniform movement. This page demonstrates Herel's simultaneous inclusion and subversion of the traditional book codex—he includes a conventional frame around the page's edge, yet does so by manipulating his letters into the necessary shapes. This suggests the malleability of text when treated as a visual entity.

Heightening the sense of aberrance, of the familiar yet unknowable, Herel also creates his own version of conventional punctuation. The final page of *Borges Sequel* features a box of text surrounding a grotesque cephalopod (Fig. 9g). The letterforms here are densely layered, tight but orderly. To the left of the exquisite corpse, the forms are overwhelmingly diagonal, running top left to bottom right. On the right hand side, and transforming into this state over the top of the creature's head, Herel includes small asterisks and circles at the end of lines. Used interchangeably, these circular forms act as barbells, halting the line's growth. They mark a stop by mimicking the form of a full stop itself. Viewing the page at arm's length, these dot shapes also present a constellation. I can look directly at the letterforms, but also jump from dot to dot. Not only is reading visual, but aesthetically multidirectional and multilayered. The round-ended shapes resemble small staffs with bulbous heads, snakes, and sperm. They are simultaneously mystical and biological, abstract yet concrete, matching the confronting character of the beast they surround. What is more, the circular shapes match the mole to be found growing on the creature's baby toe, blending text form and image together. Herel undermines the preconceived dichotomy of image and text and creates a spectrum that places them intimately close.

Demonstrated by this revised analysis of *Borges Sequel*, Herel's artists' books not only challenge the interpretation of letters but also inspire an investigation of the visual influence of textual formatting. Much like the semantic inclination one carries viewing text, the conventions by which text is displayed can influence one's reading of it. It is in this sense I argue that Herel's work can be constructively compared to Luigi Serafini's book *Codex Seraphinianus*, published in 1981.<sup>513</sup> The *Codex* describes an alternate universe, detailing aspects such as flora and fauna, human behaviour and societal trends (Fig. 10a-e).

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<sup>513</sup> Luigi Serafini, *Codex Seraphinianus* (New York: Rizzoli, 2013).

The text accompanying the numerous surreal diagrams is entirely of Serafini's own creation, and all attempts to decode his text have failed.<sup>514</sup> Serafini presents a visual system of understanding, as Herel experiments with traditional conventions of formatting. Like one might find in a modern encyclopaedia, this untranslatable text is presented in columns, lists, and tables, with particular portions of text underlined, in bold or labelling diagrams. This formatting conventionally presents positivistic knowledge, suggesting the communication of information that is factual, true and even scientific. Instead, the reader is presented with a book of information that appears to comprehensively describe a world, yet in an intentionally unknowable manner. They are given the imagery, but no clear explanation of what they are looking at. In the case of the *Codex* this manifests in a sensation of aberrance as the known is brought into direct play with the unknown. Like Herel, Serafini interrogates the inherent opacity of the world we live in.

To think of working in multiple languages as related to mental geography and belonging creates a bridge between the formal analysis of text to ideas of cartography and nostalgia, the focus of upcoming Chapter Five. By working in multiple languages—known, unknown and unknowable—Herel engages with a “bilingual and multilingual consciousness...frequently described as a complex mental geography...”<sup>515</sup> The viewer's engagement with the multiple texts portrayed throughout Herel's artist book practice reflects the complex engagement of languages within the artist's own mind. Though the interpreter may not be similarly fluent, they too are led to question the relationship and interactions between different tongues. Svetlana Boym writes:

Bilingual consciousness is not a sum of two languages, but a different state of mind altogether; often...bilingual writers reflect on the foreignness of all language and harbour a strange belief in a “pure language”, free from exilic permutations.<sup>516</sup>

Herel's interwoven languages interrogate the very nature of communication, and what it is to be rooted in reality. His self-generated text can be seen as a manifestation akin to the ‘pure language’ that Boym is referencing. A pure language that, while obfuscating semantic understanding, still clearly communicates a demand for a new aesthetic analysis of text.

To acknowledge and subsequently analyse the visual qualities of text and language in Herel's work provides a unique opportunity to relate semiotic concepts to the analysis of the artist's book. This is especially pertinent to the book as medium, as the *codex*

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<sup>514</sup> Luigi Serafini, “Decodex,” in *Codex Seraphinianus* (New York: Rizzoli, 2013).

<sup>515</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 256.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

conventionally lends itself to text-based contents and explicit, literal meaning. Yet in Herel's case, the artist interrogates the conventional promise of semantic communication in the book by using language that is unfamiliar and unknowable. The demands his work makes for a new methodology of visual semiotics, visual meaning making, can then be applied to text known to the interpreter and present a different visual reading. This application of visual semiotics can be utilised to examine the artist's book as a cohesive art object, analysing both text and language in an interwoven manner. I have demonstrated that a formal, aesthetic analysis of text is innovative and essential to the understanding of Herel's artist book oeuvre.

## Chapter Five

### Cartography, Nostalgia, Way Finding and Nowhere

The boat printed on the page is covered in a map of the Outback—‘Dingo Claypan’. The iconography is familiar, cartographic. The boat’s red porthole becomes another map marker—but of what? It is so much bigger than the other symbols, presumably marking something more important. It is hard to gather the facts of this map, it is a scrap taken out of context. It is a map stripped of the usual material to help decode it. A map abstracted, challenging my need to ‘know’, to understand the concrete information conventional cartography promises.

The word map is both noun and verb: “a drawing or other representation of the Earth’s surface...with each point in the representation corresponding to an actual geographical position; to describe, outline, chart, or represent as if on a map”.<sup>517</sup> One can map out, map down, look at a map to understand, or create a map to understand. A significant theme in Petr Herel’s artist book oeuvre is that of map and mapping. Whether individually or simultaneously, his books contain maps, and in some cases are a map in and of themselves.

This chapter will first discuss cartographic theory: ideas of the map as not only a result but also a method of research, and the place of the artist’s book as sitting in the liminal space between three-dimensional Earth and two-dimensional mapping paper. It will then innovatively apply concepts from psychogeography to analyse Herel’s aberrant work, relating the artist’s book to ideas of the labyrinth and the *flâneur*, and presenting a new idea of a geography of the artist’s book. The chapter will then continue to interrogate Herel’s context as an Eastern European artist and the ‘otherness’ this suggests, relating to ideas of nostalgia and memory, belonging and way finding. Finally, after thoroughly examining place, it will be necessary to discuss the idea of ‘nowhere’ presented and depicted in Herel’s work—the spaces and places that are unclear, uncomfortable and unknown. References to the literary work of Jorge Luis Borges will be made throughout analysis, whose preoccupations with the labyrinth, reality, and the metaphysical are thematically relevant.<sup>518</sup> For this chapter, I contend that Herel’s artist book practice challenges and expands the

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<sup>517</sup> “Map,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017,

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/113853?rskey=8RUHqS&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

<sup>518</sup> In the introduction to *Labyrinths*, J.E.I writes that “Borges once claimed that the basic devices of all fantastic literature are only four in number: the work within the work, the contamination of reality by dream, the voyage in time and the double”. Discussion of these devices is analogous to the analysis of Herel’s artists’ books.

J.E.I., “Introduction,” in *Labyrinths*, by Jorge Luis Borges (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 2011), 18.

very definition of the map and cartography. Examining his work, map is noun and verb, physical and conceptual, found place and way finding, here and nowhere. Applying ideas from cartography and psychogeography to the analysis of Herel's oeuvre both reiterates and further delves into the aberrance of the artist's book, while also providing a framework with which to approach such complex objects.

At their most conventional, maps delineate territory and state boundaries, and mark the physical presence of geographical features. This approach to mapping is objective—fact based, mathematical, scientific, practical, and functional. One uses a road map to find the route to travel to a specific place, or uses a globe to locate a nation in relation to those around it. Continuing this practical attitude, one can trace the formal etymology of the word 'map': a shortening of the Latin *mappa mundi* ('tablecloth of the world').<sup>519</sup> While this approach may seem logical, however, it has already begun to suggest an alternative approach to mapping: the etymological reference, *mappa mundi*, has in recent literature been readdressed as a genre that "[carries] meanings far beyond the conventional conceptions of mapping".<sup>520</sup> A *mappa mundi* does not just represent geographical reality but is an artefact that reflects medieval life, beliefs, and understanding.<sup>521</sup> These maps were creative endeavours, pictorial representations of life rather than physical location: "...the main goal was not to capture the mountains, rivers and cities of the physical earth but to make the incredible credible by turning the invisible visible".<sup>522</sup> Examining an example of such a map will demonstrate the artistic and epistemological motivations of early cartographers.

The exemplary *Hereford Mappa Mundi*, the largest *mappa mundi* still in existence, demonstrates the artistic attitude toward mapping in the medieval period (Fig. 1). Created circa 1300 and depicted on a single sheet of vellum, the map measures 1.59 by 1.34 metres.<sup>523</sup> Not only does it feature over four hundred cities and towns, the map also depicts images of biblical events, flora, fauna and imagined creatures, and people and scenes from classical mythology.<sup>524</sup> It represents contemporaneous life as not just informed by fact, geography and empirical knowledge, but also cultural preoccupations and beliefs. In the

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<sup>519</sup> "Map," *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2017,

[http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=map&allowed\\_in\\_frame=0](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=map&allowed_in_frame=0).

<sup>520</sup> Gunnar Olsson, *Abysmal: A Critique of Cartographic Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 57.

<sup>521</sup> Olsson expands: "their prime function was consequently not to record exact geographical facts but to imitate in drawing the lessons of the Scriptures, to weave into the same fabric the threads of time and place, history and geography, textual narrative and pictorial representation. In the minds of their makers these so-called maps were not primarily maps at all, but paintings, artistic creations made with the same techniques of illumination as other manuscripts..."

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>524</sup> "Mappa Mundi: Hereford Cathedral," Hereford Cathedral, accessed March 22, 2017, <http://www.themappamundi.co.uk/>.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.



bottom left corner of the page are the figures of Augustus Caesar and the three geographers he sent to travel and document the world.<sup>525</sup> This inclusion of a notable historical event strengthens the argument that the map is not just depicting the physical world at one time and place, but referencing larger histories and ideas.

Benedictine monk Thomas Elmham (1364-1427) used a specific term for viewing a *mappa mundi* such as the *Hereford Mappa Mundi: spectaculum*.<sup>526</sup> This conjures imagery of wonderment and awe, and suggests the map is an interactive experience or performance.<sup>527</sup> The *Hereford Mappa Mundi* is not only geographical, but also mythological and biblical. It suggests the act of mapping is not just limited to empirical knowledge but an opportunity to imaginatively interact with cultural and spiritual beliefs. Though one might assume, based on current convention, that the first documented maps directly informed daily life in a factual manner, they did in fact intersect with ideas of creative cartography. Tom McCarthy posits, “maps can be totalising visions, but they always invite their own revision”.<sup>528</sup> One might expand: conventional attitudes towards mapping can be totalising visions, but they too invite their own revision. Herel’s artists’ books present an opportunity to follow this path of re-evaluating the creativity of maps and mapping.

To map the world is a complex exercise, considering the intrinsic four-dimensionality of Earth and the flat, two-dimensionality of mapping paper.<sup>529</sup> The artist’s book as map presents a unique case study as the book rests between these two dimensions: Earth is spherical (also including features below and above its surface) and paper is flat, but the artist’s book is a tangible, held object. It is an object that can not only be held and seen, but also felt. Unlike other physical, cartographic objects like atlases or globes, the artist’s book uniquely engages with a subjective encounter as it is not limited by traditional scales, iconography and composition. It is a tangible map freed from the restraints of empiricism. The artist’s book’s place between spherical and flat, and its freedom from convention, presents the opportunity to interpret geography in unconventional manners—not only

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<sup>525</sup> Alfred Hiatt, “The Cartographic Imagination of Thomas Elmham,” *Speculum* 75 (2009): 859.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 883.

<sup>527</sup> Hiatt writes further: “the spectacle stops the reader, invokes and induces wonder, acts out historical narrative and topographic form—and can be endlessly repeated for the benefit of future generations, its future audience”.

*Ibid.*

<sup>528</sup> Hans U. Obrist, “You are here...and now,” in *Mapping it Out: An Alternative Atlas of Contemporary Cartography*, ed. Hans U. Obrist (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 236.

<sup>529</sup> McCarthy exclaims: “pick up any textbook on cartography, and the very first paragraph will invariably remind you that the Earth is spherical but paper is flat...”

Tom McCarthy, “Introduction,” in *Mapping it Out: An Alternative Atlas of Contemporary Cartography*, ed. Hans U. Obrist (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 6.

visually but also with the hands. The artist's book as map encourages a subjective, experiential encounter rather than an objective, analytical exercise.

Psychogeography acknowledges and examines the experience of being a subjective, emotional individual within a specific space—"the fact that you have an opinion about a space the moment you step into it".<sup>530</sup> It represents thinking about space and place in a way that engages with the view of the person perceiving it. Rather than presenting geographical information as empirical fact, the methodology brings back the subjective orientation banished from objective interpretation.<sup>531</sup> Given its experiential nature, a psychogeographical analysis can be productively applied to Herel's artist book oeuvre. Such a paradigm is relevant to the study of Herel's artist book practice as it engenders experiential encounters. Herel's work demands that the viewer notice their interaction with the book itself rather than simply retaining information, just as psychogeography demands the geographer note their own interaction with the landscape. The application of two key concepts in psychogeography to Herel's work—the labyrinth and the *flâneur*—demonstrates that the artist's book is an object to be analytically travelled both physically and conceptually. It is a labyrinthine object that engages with both the corporeal and cerebral.

### *The Labyrinth*

The labyrinth is an important concept in psychogeographic theory, and is evident in Herel's artists' books, as both abstract and physical journey. The artist's identification with the structure is reflected in the name of the press he created with Thierry Bouchard in 1980: Labyrinth Press. In a letter, Herel cements the significance of the labyrinth to this Press, commenting: "...what we did over 30 years, it was to fumble through a continuous labyrinth of languages, countries and cultures, time..."<sup>532</sup> The phenomenon of the labyrinth is simultaneously perplexing and orderly, chaotic and organised, an opportunity for torture and for freedom.<sup>533</sup> This duality of inescapable dreamscape and navigable structure is reminiscent of the liminality of the artist's book sitting between visual art and literature. The labyrinth and the artist's book are both phenomena whose interpretation and lasting impression is dictated by the subject experiencing them. Like the artist's book, the labyrinth

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<sup>530</sup> Karen O'Rourke, *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers* (Cambridge Mass: The MIT Press, 2013), 6-7.

<sup>531</sup> O'Rourke expands: "the Latin prefix *psyche* (breath) adds a zest of soul to the mix, linking Earth, mind and hand. Psychogeographic writing is an alternative way of reading the city". Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>532</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, March 20, 2017.

<sup>533</sup> Ronald J. Christ, *The Narrow Act: Borges' Act of Allusion* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 170-172.

is a structure that requires deliberation, a journey, and time—time to notice the nuances of different possible pathways, to be conscious of the personal choices shaping navigation. The labyrinth and the artist's book both require a degree of self-reflection. Borges wrote prolifically on the labyrinth, and the ideas expressed in his stories, as well as the body of literature analysing them, can be applied to the analysis of Herel's work. As a result, I not only argue for the consideration of the artist's book as holistic labyrinth, but also as an object comprising many other smaller interlaced mazes of time, literature, and language.

The first manner in which the psychogeographic labyrinth can be applied to understand Herel's work is by considering the phenomenon of time. One of Herel's motivations in creating his books is an opportunity to slow down time.<sup>534</sup> In a technologically driven culture, contemporary attitudes towards time can be considered fast-paced and instantaneous. Herel's work, though created in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, encourages the opportunity to consider 'the art of the return'—when interpreting one of his books, the viewer is able to choose their own path between pages, as language might not clearly communicate a chronological narrative and the imagery is not constricted by illustration. Subsequently, the viewer can move unrestricted between pages and sections of the book. One could work through the pages sequentially, but the detailed prints and tactility of the pages in hand suggests revision. The viewer might close the book, but they never finish the book. As there is no clear structure, there is no clear endpoint. In this manner, the artist's book is a labyrinth as it engages with a profoundly 'circuitous design'.<sup>535</sup> This meandering design is, importantly, indirect. The experience of the labyrinthine artist's book cannot be reduced to a single endpoint, achievable by working through prescribed steps. The labyrinthine artist's book instead presents an opportunity for the interpreter to slow down time and reflect upon the journey of interpretation through the work, dictated only by their own instinct.

A relationship between the artist's book and the labyrinth can also be forged with the idea of a twofold experience of the labyrinth: not only that from within but that from above. Experiencing the 'labyrinthicity' of the artist's book engages with descriptions of the labyrinth as confusing—one can imagine standing within a maze, high walls obfuscating orientation.<sup>536</sup> Examining the artist's book from above, as one might view a maze from an

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<sup>534</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

<sup>535</sup> Penelope Reed Doob notes that circuitous design requires "a constant doubling back", mirroring the urge to return to particular pages in a subjective, random pattern when engaging with Herel's work. Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>536</sup> Doob coins the term 'labyrinthicity' in her text *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (1990).

omniscient, bird's-eye-view, extends the self-awareness Herel's books encourage through their lack of distinct pathway. The labyrinth from above is reduced to a series of lines and complex geometric shapes, interlocking to create a larger form. From above, one can see the centre of the maze, perhaps choosing to work outwards rather than inwards. From above, one can consider the composition of the labyrinth as a cohesive visual structure, examining its form, engagement with line and perspective, and whether it presents an image of symmetry and balance or disorder. Penelope Reed Doob writes of the diagrammatic labyrinth in visual art:

Because we can see the artistic whole, intermittently at least, the labyrinth's confusing process is counterbalanced by an assurance that a great maze-maker, a controlling artist, planned the maze so that it has order, a path to a stable centre, a promise of rest within.<sup>537</sup>

The diagrammatic labyrinth presents another way to interpret what it is to be labyrinthine as it "paradoxically clarifies its own confusion".<sup>538</sup> Conventionally, it comforts the viewer by presenting the solution from the beginning, rather than leaving them disoriented by walking into a structure whose centre, their goal, they have not seen before. While Herel's work does not always present a clear solution, the knowledge it has been made is enough to imply meaning and keep the viewer engaged. Herel's use of the explicit Labyrinth Press stamp interacts with this thinking, a continuation of play with convention, expectation, habit, and time.

Not only is the artist's book a conceptually complex labyrinth, Herel's work also depicts an explicit diagrammatic representation of the form in the choice of Labyrinth Press stamp. Many of the books published under the Press feature a labyrinth stamp. Though convention might suggest that a publishing stamp should remain constant, Labyrinth Press books feature a variety of different labyrinths as stamp. This creates a new challenge of working one's way through each individual maze, and is a microcosmic manifestation of the challenge of interacting with each new labyrinthine artist's book. The labyrinth stamp featured at the front of *La Neige, un Souvenir de Matyáš Bernard Braun = Sneh, Spomienka na Matyáš Bernarda Brauna* (1989) is placed centrally on the page (Fig. 2). The circular blue maze has one point of exit and entry, and only one path leads to the centre. Its segmented, geometrical form suggests balance and logic. This logical calm contrasts feelings of

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Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 61.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

aberrance when navigating the labyrinth from within. From above, this image is comfortably formulaic. The diagrammatic labyrinth featured in *Večerní Okna = Fenêtres Sur le Soir* (1997) presents a different form entirely. While still quadrilateral, this teal coloured maze features an isosceles trapezium centre that mirrors its outer edges (Fig. 3). The lines of this labyrinth are angular and sharp rather than circular. Again, there is only one point of entry and exit, and one entry into the centre chamber. From above, the viewer is able to appreciate the striking composition of the maze. It is smaller than the previous examples, yet its paths are clearly defined. The viewer would be unable to appreciate this attention to detail from within.

The book *Aristote = Aristoteles* (1986) features an embossed labyrinth stamp that marks the paper without ink (Fig. 4). This maze is simultaneously visible and invisible—its circular pathways are legible as a whole, but to trace individual routes proves difficult for the naked eye. This is a labyrinth that invites the hand to understand its design, reiterating the significance of touch as interpretive tool. Finally, *Mezi Tupci = Au Milieu des Abrutis = Among Dullards* (2002) also depicts another small labyrinth. Herel has printed this stamp on the back of the page, making the maze appear hazy and faded through the paper (Fig. 5a). This is a labyrinth that presents more ambiguity than clearly defined logic from above. Even after turning the page to view the clearer image, this labyrinth features myriad thin pathways, with some lines bleeding into each other (Fig. 5b-c). This maze does not suggest a clear route, and though geometric, its busy lines do not suggest the immediate logic of previous examples. The centre point is larger, but the paths are less clear. The viewer is led to imagine the sheer confusion of travelling through this structure on the ground. The presence of different labyrinth stamps across different books keeps the form visually exciting. It also makes a larger comment upon experiences from above and within, of ambiguity and clarity, analogous to navigating the artist's book as a whole.

When speaking with Herel, it becomes apparent the labyrinth stamp was initially Bouchard's way to mark his presence.<sup>539</sup> However, this does not mean the symbol in this iteration does not have any significance to Herel's practice. Frédérique Martin-Scherrer, specialist on the work of poet Jean Tardieu (1903-1995, whose text Herel has used in his work), states this labyrinth symbol is relevant to Herel's own reading process.<sup>540</sup> Herel approaches reading in a non-chronological manner similar to how the viewer is encouraged to navigate his books. Martin-Scherrer notes that the artist's repeated readings, to-ing and

<sup>539</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

<sup>540</sup> Frédérique Martin-Scherrer, "Thierry Bouchard et Petr Herel: Une Création Partagée," *TextImage, Bibliothèque Jean Doucet Collectionneurs Bibliophiles* (2015), [http://www.revue-textimage.com/13\\_poesie\\_image/martin-scherrer1.html](http://www.revue-textimage.com/13_poesie_image/martin-scherrer1.html).

fro-ing, and journey through various symbols over extended periods of time, mark an endeavour analogous to navigating a maze.<sup>541</sup> Together, Bouchard and Herel have created their own complex universe.

Having discussed the labyrinth as real-time experience and the labyrinth from above it is now possible to interrogate a more complex concept of the labyrinth in relation to Herel's work: the notion of the labyrinth without centre. Literature focussed on the labyrinth generally separates various iterations into two opposing types: the multicursal maze and the unicursal maze.<sup>542</sup> The former is associated with the mazes of classical literature, in which the participant is given different options of paths to take.<sup>543</sup> The latter, the unicursal maze, only has one path to the centre.<sup>544</sup> What both of these versions have in common is a shared goal of reaching the centre. In contrast, the labyrinth without centre does not provide its navigator with a clear goal, with emphasis placed on the act of journeying rather than that of solution.

The non-chronological interpretation that Herel's books propose is relevant to the alternate idea of labyrinth without centre—both share a lack of prescribed goal. Much like the conditioned desire to semantically understand text rather than examine its aesthetic qualities, the viewer habitually approaches the labyrinth as a solvable riddle. Becoming aware of an intentional lack of finish point is confronting, contributing to the aberrance of Herel's works. His books are circuitous, as the viewer can continuously re-examine them without ever feeling the sense of an ending. They might also interpret the work differently each time they look at it. The artist's book is a profoundly limitless experience. These limitless possible interpretations and pathways are a labyrinth with no clear solution. Considering Herel's work as a never-ending labyrinth, a labyrinth without centre, is an effective method to articulate and examine the meaning of the complex artist's book.

Upon first consideration, *The Nine Doors to Your Body* (2011) is not an obvious choice to explore the labyrinthicity of Herel's artist book practice. It does not depict many of the common obstacles present in the artist's work: the poem is written in English, and the prints throughout the book explicitly relate to the poem's subject matter—entry points of the human body. Furthermore, these images present realistic, human body parts, as opposed to the exquisite corpses featured throughout Herel's oeuvre. Living beings are

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<sup>541</sup> Frédérique Martin-Scherrer, "Thierry Bouchard et Petr Herel: Une Création Partagée," *TextImage*, *Bibliothèque Jean Doucet Collectionneurs Bibliophiles* (2015), [http://www.revue-textimage.com/13\\_poesie\\_image/martin-scherrer1.html](http://www.revue-textimage.com/13_poesie_image/martin-scherrer1.html).

<sup>542</sup> Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 46-48.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

certainly not depicted in an anatomically correct manner in works such as *Borges Sequel* (1982) and *La Peau du Fantôme = Phantom Skin* (1987).<sup>545</sup> Upon first consideration, *The Nine Doors* might indeed seem easy to comprehend, and less immediately complex than Herel's other work. Yet analysing the book as a labyrinthine object questions the validity of an 'easy read'. Analysing the artist's book through a labyrinthine paradigm uniquely extends the scope of interpretation.

Engaging with the labyrinth during analysis allows the consideration of a work as containing many interpretive pathways. The first path I might travel to analyse *The Nine Doors* is a study of the relationship between image and text. Guillaume Apollinaire's (1880-1918) poem is a declaration of loving a woman named Madeleine.<sup>546</sup> The poet boldly lists what he describes as the nine doors of her body, of which he has only experienced seven. On adjacent or following pages, Herel includes prints of the body parts referenced in each section of the poem. A pair of eyes is portrayed across a double page spread, with ears and nostrils then depicted each on their own page (Fig. 6a-c). Mouth and vagina are later presented across a double page spread, and the final pair of buttocks sits together (Fig. 6d-e). By containing imagery that is more obviously related to the text, *The Nine Doors* encourages me to also reflect upon Herel's larger body of work.

*The Nine Doors* continues its labyrinthicity by depicting the body as geography. Both text and image explicitly refer to particular features of Madeleine's body. As such, the book can be interpreted as a map of the woman's body. Much like a conventional topographical map, the bodily landscape has been reduced to the features considered its most essential. Not only do the prints more largely relate to a physical assessment of Madeleine, but body parts become analogous to topographical forms. The body becomes a landscape. The prints of left and right eye are reminiscent of a hilly scene, and the central patch of negative space in the middle of the nostrils resembles an island. The buttocks are printed at the top of the page, leaving a mass of negative space below them. From above, they create the outline of a confluence, a meeting of large ocean and thin channel. Each buttock becomes a coastal landscape, with the textured edges a beach worn by the tide. Not only is the artist's book itself a terrain to navigate, so too are the prints within.

Presented together, each of these singular, geographic features interrogates realities of scale and orientation. The depiction of mouth and vagina side by side challenges scale. These two 'doors' are anatomically at opposite poles of the female body. By bringing them

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<sup>545</sup> For further analysis of *La Peau du Fantôme*, see Chapter Three and discussion on the exquisite corpse.

<sup>546</sup> The text reads: "This poem is for you alone Madeleine/It is one of the first poems of our desire/It is our first secret poem O you whom I love..."

together, Herel presents an unconventional depiction of the body, and the opportunity to aesthetically compare the forms. The lips of the mouth are reflected in the lips of the vagina. Both shapes are dark, and have a thin line of negative space separating respective lips. The fine lines of separation suggest plush, bouncing texture. While in reality it would be difficult to depict both of these features from the one perspective, Herel has condensed scale to evoke the desire communicated in the poem. Not only is this a geographical map of the body, it is also a psychological map of the poet's desire. Again, the body has been reduced to essential features, yet these features represent an extended and personal wanting. This is much like geographic locations that are not just physical sites but places that engage with an individual's memories, nostalgia and emotion. Interestingly, Herel's representation of womanhood here is not a fetishised and grotesque exquisite corpse, as seen in other work, but a more tender and realistic rendering of the female body.

Studying the colophon of *The Nine Doors* reveals another uncharacteristic choice compared to Herel's larger oeuvre. The text states the book contains 'nine body prints'. In most of his other books, Herel uses traditional printmaking terminology to describe technique—etching, engraving, mezzotint; with most terms identified in French. However here the artist has deviated by creating images of body parts using a photocopier.<sup>547</sup> The body parts, abstracted beyond their "obvious naturalism", are still a response to the charged physicality of Apollinaire's poem.<sup>548</sup> Using the concept of the labyrinth as a framework to compartmentalise and analyse the complexities of *The Nine Doors*, I am able to consider the smallest of details and their relation to larger themes and practices with the artist's oeuvre.

The final analytical path to travel through the labyrinthine *The Nine Doors* is the symbolic significance of doors. Apollinaire writes of various bodily orifices as entry points to the body, places through which he is able to interact with the inside of Madeleine. This idea of an interaction as moving through a doorway from the outside to the inside mirrors the experience of interacting with Herel's work. When engaging with the artist's book, the page is the doorway. Turning the pages, I move from outside of the book and enter the metaphysical world Herel is creating through his choice of symbolic texts and surreal imagery. Undertaking the journey of travelling the different labyrinthine pathways presented by Herel's work requires reflexivity, self-awareness and the ability to move beyond conventional approaches to embrace the larger connections to be made between imagery, poetry, and interpretation. To take the time to engage with this process, accepting

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<sup>547</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, April 13, 2017.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid.



the lack of clear solution or definition of Herel's artist book practice, is to maximise interpretation.<sup>549</sup>

Borges wrote prolifically on the labyrinth, referencing both physical and intellectual iterations of the structure. The entirety of his literary oeuvre can be considered a labyrinth in its own right, as his twisting, illusionistic writing challenges complacent reading.<sup>550</sup> In *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), Borges tells the story of narrator Doctor Yu 'Tsun, a World War I German spy. In hiding from the authorities, he visits the home of Dr Stephen Albert, an academic with specific interests in 'Tsun's ancestor 'Ts'ui Pên.<sup>551</sup> Pên had famously abandoned all responsibility, dedicating his life to making a complex book and a complex labyrinth. As 'Tsun learns, the famous book and labyrinth were, in fact, one and the same project. They marked a larger, profound musing on the phenomenon of time.<sup>552</sup> Pên "believed in an infinite series of times, in a dizzily growing, ever spreading network of diverging, converging and parallel times".<sup>553</sup> Through his codex, he was trying to create a labyrinth of time and space, whereby every possible outcome of an event was discussed, and this multiplicity itself then analysed. *The Garden of Forking Paths* demonstrates Borges' thematic preoccupation with the never-ending labyrinth, and book as a labyrinthine site.

A brief analysis of *The Library of Babel* (1941) further validates the relevance of Borges' writing to a new analysis of Herel's labyrinthine books.<sup>554</sup> The narrator of the story describes the universe as made up of an "indefinite, perhaps an infinite" number of hexagonally shaped galleries, known as the Library.<sup>555</sup> The Library houses all of the books that could possibly be made, and yet the publications are not ordered—while those within the Library have all of the knowledge in front and around them, they will never find what it is they are looking for. The Library's collection is an impossible labyrinth that ironically denies knowledge, its vast collection instead creating a state of chaos. Here, books do not create a fruitful labyrinth, but one that promotes despair and helplessness. The narrator

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<sup>549</sup> As Raymond Tallis writes of accepting a slower, detail oriented methodology: "we are at liberty to redirect our gaze within a visual field or to reposition ourselves in order to open up another visual field". Engaging with the aberrant artist's book labyrinth is to open up such an additional visual field.

Raymond Tallis, *Reflections of a Metaphysical Flâneur and Other Essays* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 26.

<sup>550</sup> Christ writes that this "puzzlement may fatigue the reader or it may encourage him to pursue the game. If he does continue, he will quickly find that it is much easier to understand three of four Borges stories than to understand only one. As he reads on, the reader discovers that assumptions and techniques common to almost all the stories gradually emerge and define themselves", later concluding: "ultimately, Borges demands that we make a distinction between the labyrinth in the story and the labyrinth of the story".

Ronald J. Christ, *The Narrow Act: Borges' Act of Allusion* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 1, 172.

<sup>551</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1962), 89-101.

<sup>552</sup> Borges writes: "I know that of all problems, none disquieted him more, and none concerned him more than the profound one of time".

*Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-88.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

laments on being unable to find the information he needs: “if honour and wisdom and happiness are not for me, let them be for others. May heaven exist, though my place be in hell. Let me be outraged and annihilated, but may Thy enormous Library be justified, for one instant, in one being”.<sup>556</sup> Borges encourages the reader to consider the different emotional implications of moving through different labyrinthine structures, applicable to the argument for a subjective and experiential analysis of Herel’s artist book practice. An exploration of Borges’ labyrinth stories innovatively informs the study of Herel’s practice, both as source of inspiration for the artist, but also in posing questions that can then be applied to analysis of the artist’s work. The study of the labyrinth and travel through the labyrinthine book dictates a focus upon the interpreter, the traveller, the wandering *flâneur*.

### *The Flâneur*

Analysing the experiential labyrinthicity of the artist’s book is further informed by the movements of another psychogeographical figure: the *flâneur*. Along with the labyrinth, the figure of the *flâneur* is particularly prevalent in psychogeographical literature. Writing of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) in the nineteenth century, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) coined the term to describe a man who wanders the streets of Paris.<sup>557</sup> This activity is not the mark of an aimless character in a negative, unproductive sense, but one who notices the nuance of the everyday. The *flâneur* is a philosopher of the city, one who finds a metaphysical pleasure in the experience of the crowd.<sup>558</sup> Put simply, this figure gives himself the freedom to look and see, to slow down and notice the details, however much they are otherwise overlooked as mundane or unimportant.

To be a *flâneur* is to be hyperconscious of the materials that make up the surrounding city, or, in Herel’s case, of the materials that make up the book in hand. Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809-1849) treatment of the protagonist in *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) emphasises the act of *flânerie* as exercising great attention to detail. Poe refers to the protagonist’s crowd watching as becoming, over time, a ‘descent into details’.<sup>559</sup> I propose that this focus on an attention to detail can be used to extend the act of *flânerie* to a variety of interpretive contexts. In his experimental novel *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* (1975), Georges Perec (1936-1982) did not walk through Paris, instead remaining stationary and watching that which moved past him. Over one weekend, Perec sat at a café at the Place Saint-Sulpice and recorded the everyday, explaining:

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<sup>556</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1962), 85-86.

<sup>557</sup> Keith Tester, “Introduction,” in *The Flâneur* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

<sup>558</sup> Raymond Tallis, *Reflections of a Metaphysical Flâneur and Other Essays* (Durham: Acumen, 2013), 6.

<sup>559</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings: Poems, Tales, Essays and Reviews* (London: Penguin, 2003), 132.

My intention in the pages that follow was to describe the rest instead: that which is not generally taken note of, that which is not noticed, that which has no importance: what happens when nothing happens...<sup>560</sup>

Sitting in the café, Perec ponders people, vehicles, architecture, fashion, food and his own habits.<sup>561</sup> The writer's preoccupation with allowing himself the time to notice everyday details mirrors the slow looking encouraged by a nonlinear reading of the artist's book. Mark Lowenthal articulates Perec's interest in the 'infraordinary' in a manner I argue analogous to the interpretation of the book as art object:

... 'Attempt' was one of Perec's clearer efforts to grapple with what he termed the 'infraordinary': the markings and manifestations of the everyday that consistently escape our attention as they compose the essence of our lives.<sup>562</sup>

Herel's work certainly engages with this idea of the 'infraordinary'—the concept of book as art object requires an appreciation of typically overlooked details. By noticing the details of the everyday, the act of *flânerie* is thereby an appropriate and innovative methodology in application to the analysis of Herel's work, as an extension of the slow looking process.<sup>563</sup>

To be a *flâneur* of the artist's book is to distance myself from any preconceived notions of reading or viewing. Informed instead by formal analysis, the application of *flânerie* to Herel's work involves two intertwined paths: physical and conceptual wandering. This is made evident by an exploration of the Labyrinth Press work *Sur le Pont Charles = Na Karlově Mostě* (1997). The front cover is immediately tactile, reminiscent of the lumpy surfaces of *papier-mâché* (Fig. 7.a). This work is the only book from the Press to feature collaboration with another artist, Jean-Édouard Augsburguer (1925-2008), who created the paper sculpture that encases the interior sheets.<sup>564</sup> Before I have even opened the book, this casing proves to be of conceptual significance. The work suggests a physical representation

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<sup>560</sup> Georges Perec, *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, trans. Marc Lowenthal (Cambridge Mass: Wakefield Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>561</sup> One day, Perec writes: "I'm drinking Vittel water, whereas yesterday I was drinking a coffee (how does that transform the square?)"

*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>562</sup> Marc Lowenthal, afterword to *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, by Georges Perec (Cambridge Mass: Wakefield Press, 2010), 51.

<sup>563</sup> David Frisby writes of *flânerie* as analytical methodology: "...the *flâneur*/detective is a central, often metaphorical, figure that Benjamin employs to illuminate his own activity and method...*Flânerie*, in other words, can be associated with a form of looking, observing, ...a form of reading the city and its population...and a form of reading written texts..." The extension of this methodology to being a *flâneur* of the artist's book is original to this thesis.

David Frisby, "The Flâneur in Social Theory," in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994) 82-83.

<sup>564</sup> National Library of Australia, "*Sur le pont Charles = Na Karlově mostě*," Catalogue Record, (2017), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129240?lookfor=sur%20le%20pont%20charles&offset=1&max=234966>.

of topographical forms through Augsburg's sculptural mouldings. The tactile lumps create the geographic form of a coastline made palm-sized. Though the book's dimensions mean it is held comfortably in one hand, these shapes project a monumental quality by creating plateaus that rest comparatively high above the rest of the paper. This changing surface results in the work presenting depth through the creation of shadows. The palpable sensation of landmass is mirrored by Herel's etching to the right of the cover, which visually simulates a hill or island. It comprises many intersecting, flecked lines, as if delineating territory on a conventional map. The ground in the print is pockmarked with small circles, and crooked singular lines grow off the printed form and into the sculptural side of the work. These lines suggest new growth—sprouts and shoots. This idea of tactile growth is strengthened by the deckle edges of the paper, which, rather than creating an outline of the book as a clear form, leave its edges organic and ambiguous. The work is a washed out green, bringing to mind the breakdown of green land and blue water on everyday maps. The conventionally static book object is given a sense of dynamic movement as an artist's book. Its tactile, material surface suggests growth and decay.

Inside the cover, the book continues to feature forms that mimic geographic topography and reference parts of the human body. Both the interior and the spine of the book demonstrate a physical moulding of the paper (Fig. 7b). To the left, I note the inverse of the raised shapes on the front cover. Compared to the recto, these shapes appear geometric. The spine features lumping masses suggestive of vertebrae—an appropriate observation, considering both the book spine and the human spine share a similar function of holding everything together. This bumpy spine physically communicates a message of tactility, emphasising the material characteristics of the paper that creates book cover and book pages alike. It is a detail of Perec's 'infraordinary', reminding me of the materials and process that created the finished object in hand. Conducting analysis through the lens of the *flâneur* allows me to engage my senses to interpret the artist's book, to physically travel across its material landscape.

The poem contained over the pages of *Sur le Pont Charles*, by Swiss poet Pierre Chappuis (1930-), explores "meeting a blind person on the Charles Bridge in Prague and the darkening of the surrounding world that results".<sup>565</sup> Combining the material qualities of the book with this conceptual context, it can be argued that the overtly tactile quality of the

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<sup>565</sup> National Library of Australia, "*Sur le pont Charles = Na Karlově mostě*," Catalogue Record, (2017), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129240?lookfor=sur%20le%20pont%20charles&offset=1&max=234966>.

book references the significance of touch to said blind person.<sup>566</sup> The centrespread leaf features a green etching by Herel (Fig. 7c). Slashing lines tear across the centrefold, agitated and violent in their sharp ferocity. At the left and right edges of the spread are forms reminiscent of the island on the front cover. The visual beauty of Prague is unavailable to the blind man, but he may be drawn to find a different version of beauty in the sculptural shapes of these pages, that which other readers might overlook. By adopting the persona of the *flâneur*, by travelling through the book as such a figure might a metropolitan street, I am given the time to make new connections between form and content, using my own body and imagined experiences as a point of reference. To use slow looking is to take time with a book, and to apply the attitude of the *flâneur* is to be forced to notice the details this time exposes.

This innovative application of *flânerie* is not just relevant to this example, but can be extended to the analysis of all of the works that make up Herel's artist book oeuvre. It is an attentive manner of engaging with the book that embraces a lack of set interpretive instructions, allowing viewers to dictate their own journey and consequently maintain focus and interest. Importantly, the *flâneur's* lack of set path results in a lack of set endpoint. There is no specific goal to be reached. Acting as a *flâneur* of the artist's book validates the new understanding of Herel's work as open-ended.

The new analytical lens of *flânerie* can be used to analyse the book *Stesk* (2000), translated from Czech as 'nostalgia' or 'languor'.<sup>567</sup> The cover of the work is a seemingly plain white, which upon closer examination features embossing reminiscent of reptilian scales (Fig. 8a). The grids of this intricate pattern are simultaneously mathematical and biological, like the weathered pattern of crocodile hide. The first spread of the book is in stark contrast to this textural quality, the left page a blank white and the right a dark black (Fig. 8b). Though the right page is black, upon closer examination small, veined creases appear to document the sheet's handling over time—movement stemming from the act of creation, and the time other viewers have spent with the work, wearing the pages with their hands. The text page, featuring a four-line poem by Czech writer Jan Marius Tomeš (1913-2010), contains basic seriffed font on white paper. Book title in mind, this emptiness might be considered not as

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<sup>566</sup> In her essay *Thierry Bouchard et Petr Herel: Une Création Partagée*, Martin-Scherrer suggests the deep embossing encourages us to consider the book as a work accessible to the touch of those who cannot physically see the etchings.

Frédérique Martin-Scherrer, "Thierry Bouchard et Petr Herel: Une Création Partagée," *TextImage, Bibliothèque Jean Doucet Collectionneurs Bibliophiles* (2015), [http://www.revue-textimage.com/13\\_poesie\\_image/martin-scherrer1.html](http://www.revue-textimage.com/13_poesie_image/martin-scherrer1.html).

<sup>567</sup> National Library of Australia, "Stesk," Catalogue Record, (2017), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129244?lookfor=stesk&offset=1&max=1>.

representing nothing, but communicating a pause, or a memory lost. While the writing appears conventional, Herel has chosen to leave small gaps between the letters of the capitalised title and between the two verses. This creates a steady visual rhythm, and room again for further pause. The composition of the text appears even, balanced, and calm.

*Stesk* features two colour mezzotints by Herel, both printed on delicate black paper (Fig. 8c-d). The first print is composed of smudged gold, yellow, silver, and red. It appears as though a group of shooting stars are falling towards a circular shape in the bottom left corner of the page. This form is the only one coloured red, acting as the end focal point of the linear constellation. The second mezzotint also depicts what appears to be a star or meteor shower, a display of lights shooting through the dark sky. The left page remains blank, again presenting the veined creases created by repeated page turning. This could be a scene of celebration, but might also be a scene of a faded memory reduced to ambiguous, floating shapes and light—it is this imagery that contributes to the overwhelming melancholic atmosphere of the book. The application of a *flâneur* inspired lens to Herel's artist book practice is essential in allowing the time and space to focus on the smallest nuances of the page, and their effect upon the larger art object and experience of it. It encourages the inclusion of subjectivity into interpretation, and specifically focuses upon the presence of the individual in a space, or in this case, the individual handling the object. The proposed method of *flânerie* facilitates an expansion of conventional interpretation by justifying an individually led exploration of the minutiae. It provides the framework for an unstructured journey.

### *Nostalgia and Belonging*

The significance of cartography in Herel's work cannot be thoroughly examined without exploring ideas of nostalgia and belonging. Herel was born in Hořice, Czechoslovakia, before living in Dijon and Paris, France, then moving to Canberra and finally settling in Melbourne, Australia. He is an Eastern European artist with central European experiences now living and working in Australia. He is a polyglot, has lived as part of a variety of cultures in a variety of capacities. With this constant shift in location and an interest in cartography, it is unsurprising that Herel confirms his preoccupation with questioning what it is to belong: "...memory, nostalgia and belonging are dear subjects to me and were often at the basis of what I was doing".<sup>568</sup> As an artist living and working in Anglo Australia, Herel's heritage and life experience contribute to a specific worldview and individual aesthetic—one that focuses heavily on themes of way finding and belonging. To associate

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<sup>568</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, March 20, 2017.

Herel with a sense of ‘otherness’ is not a reductive or naïve label, as the artist himself identifies a life-long distance from the ‘real world’: “...in [the early] eighties I didn’t have too much experience and interest ‘to face the world’ (as a matter of fact I did not have much more later, or even now...)”.<sup>569</sup> To write of Herel’s ‘otherness’ is not to associate the artist with connotations of aimlessness or disinterest. Instead, Herel’s books are the work of an individual who creates from a unique standpoint of interwoven places, languages and experience. Outlining his cultural context suggests a reason for the creation of works that challenge language, the idea of chronological progress, and time.

I argue that nostalgia is a major, and previously unaddressed, theme in Herel’s artist book oeuvre. The term originates from a combination of the Ancient Greek *nostos* (‘a return home’) and *algia* (‘a longing’).<sup>570</sup> It can be related to cartography through this focus upon place—the notion of home, emotional associations with location, and inextricable ties between space and memory. Despite its etymology, the term did not originate in classical times, instead been coined in the 1688 dissertation of Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer (1669–1752).<sup>571</sup> It was used by Hofer to describe those who experienced negative emotions due to “a desire to return to their homeland”.<sup>572</sup>

Originally a medical term, nostalgia was later transformed in the late nineteenth century into a trend in art and culture.<sup>573</sup> Western society became obsessed with memorials, museums and the cabinet of curiosities.<sup>574</sup> People found pleasure in dreaming of the past, of better times gone, and nostalgia became highly romanticised through acts of album making and wistful poetry.<sup>575</sup> Nostalgia became theatrical. Svetlana Boym notes the creation of such personal *memento mori* and expression facilitated a “plunge into domestic daydreaming and armchair nostalgia”.<sup>576</sup> This is where Herel’s work questions this historical attitude towards nostalgia as a longing for the past—when interacting with one of his books, the viewer is particularly conscious of their present movements and their interaction with Herel’s original response to texts that are often hundreds of years old. The artist’s book is not an opportunity to passively drape oneself across a lounge chair, but an opportunity to engage with nostalgia in the present. As the reader is conscious of their own

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<sup>569</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, March 20, 2017.

<sup>570</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii.

<sup>571</sup> Boym comments that the term nostalgia itself is “nostalgically Greek”.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 15.

movements and time is slowed, they are able to feel themselves both interacting with memories and creating their own.

I argue that in Herel's case, the locative aspect of nostalgia does not relate to a specific place but a feeling. Herel's work reaches for a specific moment—the experience of poetry. Like the poetic space created as a viewer interprets Herel's work, the book also reflects Herel's own personal experience of the writing enclosed. Boym writes of the difference between melancholia and nostalgia:

Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.<sup>577</sup>

Herel engages with nostalgia not in terms of state or nation, but in relation to the group of poets, writers and collaborators whose work he reads and incorporates into his books. His work is a physical manifestation of the metaphysical state of being when reading an inspiring line. It is simultaneously corporeal and conceptual, and Herel's nostalgia for feeling is inextricably tied to the cultural space he has created for himself through reading. Each book is an epitaph to a moment of connection with a particular text, an interaction with a particular poet.

Demonstrative of this nostalgic sensibility, Herel returns to the same core group of writers throughout his oeuvre. In a 2015 letter, the artist listed important poets and writers, alongside how often he had used their respective texts.<sup>578</sup> By returning to the same writers, Herel has formed a social group, and includes himself as a member. While these writers may not have interacted during their physical lives, Herel draws everyone together to create a new space in which they co-exist and mingle. This is the cultural space that Herel nostalgically references in his work.

Herel's extended engagement with particular texts is an additional expression of nostalgia. The artist speaks of the 'gestation periods' that often occur between first reading a poem and later including it in a work.<sup>579</sup> The texts presented in finished artists' books are subsequently those of sustained inspiration. Herel states:

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<sup>577</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xvi.

<sup>578</sup> This list: Vladimír Holan (x7); Rainer Maria Rilke (x5); Dimitris Tsaloumas (x5); Antonin Artaud (x3); Pierre Albert-Birot (x3); Novalis (x2); Saint-Pol-Roux (x2); Charles Baudelaire (x2); Jorge Luis Borges (x2); Arthur Rimbaud (x2); and Jules Supervielle (x2).

Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, May 20, 2015.

<sup>579</sup> Des Cowley, "In Conversation: Petr Herel." *Imprint*, no. 4 (2016): 23.



Often there is a long gestation period between my first reading of a text and the making of a book in response to that text, sometimes years. Words that have lain dormant for over 20 years will suddenly come alive for me.<sup>580</sup>

This is a direct reflection, or perhaps articulates the cause, of Herel's devotion to the slowing down of time. A thought-provoking line is not used immediately in the next book the artist creates, rather left for later use after a period of incubation. Similar to the act of slow looking at a work of art, to leave this line is to let it rest and expand in the artist's subconscious—a period of creative gestation.

Herel's *livres pauvres* reflect the artist's individual engagement with material and document intimate, interactive moments between artist and poetry. In an interview with Des Cowley, Rare Printed Collections Manager at the State Library of Victoria, Cowley asks Herel about these objects, introduced as part of a presentation by the artist midway through his Creative Fellowship at the Library:

At this presentation you showed off a range of what you called *livre pauvre* works. These were small, delicate and unique handmade books, folded and unstitched, containing drawings and handwritten texts. They were not drafts or mock-ups for proposed works—they were complete in themselves...Are they part of your thinking process, or a means of finding a route into the work?<sup>581</sup>

While Herel does not see the point in categorising his work, as everything he makes is creative output, he does comment that the *livre pauvre* format provides an opportunity to create smaller, often one-off works that invite play with the space of a page in a more immediate manner.<sup>582</sup> In this sense, they are a microcosmic iteration of his artist book practice—the ability to play with the continuous space and the depth facilitated by the codex in a more experimental manner. They are a tangible, intimate manifestation of the artist's thought process, and represent the artist's developing relationships with particular texts, methods, and materials. This is cemented by Herel's identification of the *livre pauvre* as a delicate, personal, and private kind of book.<sup>583</sup>

Analysis of the *livre pauvre* *My New Room* (2010) reveals the intimacy of the format, allowing the artist to use varying texts and experiment with material. The book is made of a small strip of thin grey paper, concertinaed into four panels separated by folded crease (Fig. 9a). I

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<sup>580</sup> Des Cowley, "In Conversation: Petr Herel." *Imprint*, no. 4 (2016): 23.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>582</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

am able to control the format of the book as I stretch and fold the sheet. This emphasis upon the space of the page, the growth and reduction of page space, reflects Herel's interest in the depth facilitated by the codex. The first panel contains the outline of a three-dimensional cube, with the title 'My New Room' written diagonally across the form (Fig. 9b). Herel's name is written at the bottom of this cubic space, this room, and Iraqi poet Badr al-Sayyab's (1926-1964) name rests along the upper edge. By including both their names around this contained geometric form, the artist creates a shared space for both himself and the poet. Indeed Herel comments that while he cannot remember the exact source of the text, it has remained a passage he values very much.<sup>584</sup> This first panel image symbolises the creation of a relationship between artist and wordsmith.

*My New Room* additionally exposes the value of the *livre pauvre* through the experimentation with material it allows. Importantly, the inclusion of drawings and handwriting, rather than typography and prints, is evocative of immediacy. In turn, this suggests a sense of immediate personal response. Caroline Field comments:

...Petr Herel has developed his love of drawing and its immediacy in the act of creation. The heady potency of the moment of inception, when an image in its purest form emerges from the corners of his mind and becomes a reality for the artist...is essential.<sup>585</sup>

The sketch-like quality of the dotted lines throughout the work suggests a kind of polished diagram, an automatic response putting the materials at hand to paper after reading the poetry. Supporting this immediacy, and reflecting the *livre pauvre*'s encouragement of experimentation, the white ink used in *My New Room* is in fact whiteout (or liquid paper, Fig. 9c).<sup>586</sup> Herel has used a material of elimination, conventionally applied to make errors invisible, to create a visible image. Not only is the artist experimenting with materials physically, he is also testing their conceptual or symbolic possibilities. The creation of 'something' out of what is typically 'nothing', the use of an invisible material to create concrete image, speaks to the sense of otherwise ineffable nostalgia contained and made tangible within the artist's work.

Another *livre pauvre* evoking the artist's thought process and nostalgic engagement with text is *Fenêtre Défenestrée* (2003). Here, nostalgia is aroused through a sense of intimacy and experimentation. Herel sent sheets of paper to colleague Daniel Leuwers, requesting he

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<sup>584</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

<sup>585</sup> *Petr Herel: Drawings, Prints, Artist Books* (Collingwood, Vic.: Australian Galleries, 2010).

<sup>586</sup> Herel, op cit.

handwrite his text multiple times.<sup>587</sup> Herel left the first version readable, before increasingly burning the words on succeeding pages to the point of elimination (Fig. 10a-e).<sup>588</sup> The result is a book that portrays a transformation of meaning. Concrete words are gradually turned into abstracted burnt holes and singed forms.

This *livre pauvre* interacts with nostalgia in a multifaceted manner, with each element working and combining with the next to create an overwhelmingly intimate viewing experience. The pages Herel sent to Leuwers were off cuts of the textured Nepalese paper favoured by long-time colleague and friend Thierry Bouchard. Consequently, the foundational materials of the book are a result of personal exchange, part of a continuing, creative relationship. Herel's decision to use Leuwers' text, and indeed ask the poet himself to handwrite his own words, reflects the significance of their relationship.

Herel calculates that he and Leuwers have collaborated on approximately 49 works together, ranging in complexity and format.<sup>589</sup> This multitude of books was the result of Leuwers sending Herel already folded paper on which he had written a poem, asking the artist to contribute to the page and then return the work.<sup>590</sup> Notably, Leuwers would send several copies of the same poem—creating a small edition of the *livre pauvre*—yet the placement of words in each folded segment was not uniformed.<sup>591</sup> This meant that Herel had to adapt his response to fit with each new composition. This arguably resulted in works that represent the artist's changing relationship with the text, simultaneously under the influence of repeatedly reading the same text but also being presented with the words in a new manner. Herel comments that Leuwers' investment in this fast-paced collaboration has resulted in a private collection of thousands of *livres pauvres* from a variety of artists. By including close friends and collaborators in *Fenêtre Défenestrée* Herel was actively creating memories, each individual presence gathered together in the one space.

This sense of intertwined intimacy and nostalgia is also evident considering the burning technique used throughout *Fenêtre Défenestrée*. Strategically burning parts of the page became a particularly important technique for Herel, developed by experimentation in smaller books such as this. The artist is conscious that he must work to make this burning conceptually significant, rather than a “cheap and slick” gimmick.<sup>592</sup> In *Fenêtre Défenestrée*, rather than demonstrating a *laissez-faire* attitude to paper, burnt holes are a deliberate

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<sup>587</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

representation of elimination. Rather than creating a sense of nothing, much like the artist's ironic use of whiteout ink in *My New Room*, these holes greatly contribute to the composition of the page. They emphasise the materiality of the paper and the journey between pages, with subsequent pages teasingly visible through small holes. Furthermore, the burns emphasise the materiality of the creative process. An early example of Herel's interest in burning paper, the artist created the holes in *Fenêtre Défenestrée* using wire heated over a naked flame. Consequently, the artist light-heartedly refers to the work as "kitchen", playfully referencing kitsch but also evoking a domestic image of the artist working at home with basic materials.<sup>593</sup> While he later moved on to use a device to control the intensity of heat, this original, basic method required a great deal of focus. The thin page demanded the artist work quickly so as to not burn too much.<sup>594</sup> This image also evokes intimacy, with emphasis placed upon the exact moment of hot wire touching page, metal touching paper, controlled by the human hand. A discussion of the techniques involved in creating this *livre pauvre* makes evident the value of the format in providing a space for experimentation, reflection upon relationships, and the development of concepts key to later work.

Aside from his *livres pauvres*, a concrete reference to time and longing in Herel's larger practice can be found in the artist's continued use of the one plate throughout a work. This repetition engages with memory as the relationship between past, present, and future prints is emphasised through particularly subtle changes. Herel states that this reuse is a conscious choice to establish a sense of movement throughout the book and create a sense of specific space.<sup>595</sup> The repeated prints engage with time to slow down the pace of viewing, "asking [the] reader to go back and to think about the particular order of images, their transformations..."<sup>596</sup> The reprinting of the same plate gives each book a sense of individual life—the subtle development of the imagery over time mimics organic growth. Herel articulates the "Time" emphasised by this repetition is not related to dynamic animation, like turning the changing pages of a flipbook, but instead a "Time" that touches on "Growth" and "Decay".<sup>597</sup> Rather than creating a fast-paced movement throughout the work, the repetitive imagery makes the viewer aware of the subtle development of the book at the turn of each page. Herel's choice of plate repetition reflects the nostalgia the artist feels for a slower paced interaction.

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<sup>593</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, April 13, 2017.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> The capitalisation of 'Time', 'Growth', and 'Decay' is intentional, mirroring Herel's own in a 2017 letter. This both reveals and references the significance of these themes to the artist's practice. Ibid.

The nostalgic reference to the interaction of reader and book in Herel's work informs ideas of belonging and way finding. Herel's books engage with the memory of a fleeting experience that cannot ever be perfectly recreated. There is no prescribed method to go about creating an intimate connection between reader, poetry, and image. It depends as much on the text as it does one's mood on the day, the environment in which they are reading, the emotions they have been experiencing, even their diet. In this sense, nostalgia is an interaction with fantasy.<sup>598</sup> Boym articulates nostalgia's grasp for the fleeting:

Nostalgia tantalises us with its fundamental ambivalence; it is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialisation of the immaterial.<sup>599</sup>

Herel's personal interest in nostalgia is not necessarily just about yearning for a particular material place nor even a particular time, it is even more immaterial in its yearning for the timeless moment of poetic experience. It is a reference to a moment of thought, suspended in time. By creating works that one never feels they have finished, and by encouraging a non-chronological subjective interpretation, Herel's nostalgic work exists right now. It can be described using the present tense (it did not happen, but is instead happening), and as such suspends time in a moment of poetic timelessness, a self-created and personal form of nostalgia.<sup>600</sup>

Herel's nostalgia is for timelessness. This yearning without specific location can be compared to Borges' approach to temporality in his writing. *The Immortal* (1947) tells the story of a man consumed by a desire to visit the 'City of the Immortals'. He believes that upon visiting this City he too will be able to achieve immortality. However, before reaching the labyrinthine city, he is taken by a tribe of seemingly dumb men who live on the outskirts. He is then followed into the City by one of these figures, who waits for the narrator to return from what was a lonely, confused and ultimately fruitless journey through the meandering City walls. Returning to the tribesman, the protagonist notices the man drawing in the sand. Until this point, the tribe had been entirely noncommunicative.

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<sup>598</sup> Boym writes of that not only is nostalgia "a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy".

Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiii.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>600</sup> Stewart articulates the confrontational acknowledgement of a book's infinite nature: "The closure of the book is an illusion largely created by its materiality, its cover. Once the book is considered on the plane of its significance, it threatens infinity". Herel's books are aberrant in their duality as tangible object and representation of infinity.

Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 38.

He was stretched out on the sand, where he was tracing clumsily and erasing a string of signs that, like the letters in our dreams, seem on the verge of being understood and then dissolve.<sup>601</sup>

As the tribesman begins to talk, it becomes apparent that these men on the outskirts are in fact the immortals. They have become so obsessed with thought that they have physically regressed to absolute stillness. Nothing of typical culture remains for them—they do not interact with each other, they barely eat, and they do not behave according to any particular timing. The narrator states: “...they determined to live in thought, in pure speculation...Absorbed in thought, they hardly perceived the physical world”.<sup>602</sup> In this story, to be immortal is to become so lost in never-ending thought that one does not engage with normal time. Knowing the inspiration of Borges’ work upon Herel, such a story becomes relevant to the analysis of his books. Herel’s work provides the viewer with an analogous opportunity to become lost in a seemingly timeless space.

Herel’s nostalgia for timelessness and sense of belonging in timelessness is visually represented in the 2013 book *Bárka = The Barge*. This work presents the eponymous poem by Greek Australian Tsaloumas (1921-2016), and a letter from May 2010 written by Tomeš explaining his inability to complete a Czech translation due to declining health.<sup>603</sup> Tomeš writes that to finish the translation is but a ‘dream’.<sup>604</sup> In this sense, *Bárka* is one of the poet’s final works, and though he died three months after writing the included text, his handwritten note freezes his presence in the pages of the book—Tomeš simultaneously becomes a timeless figure as his mark lives on, but also remains resolutely finite as his graphic mark outlives his physical body.<sup>605</sup>

The imagery included in *Bárka* is a continuation of this sense of timelessness. The double page spread featuring the letter from Tomeš is washed with varying shades of grey and brown (Fig. 11a). Broad brushstrokes sweeping across the bottom of the work are reminiscent of the ocean—of waves or lapping tide. Smaller strokes at the top of the page appear as faint raindrops, urgently moving towards the body of water below. The colour palette creates a sombre atmosphere. This is not an ocean of the sunny, happy kind as might feature on a postcard. This ocean is tumultuous, dark, and gloomy. Its depth is unclear, the ocean floor perhaps so far away it is unreachable.

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<sup>601</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 2011), 142.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>603</sup> National Library of Australia, “Bárka = The Barge,” Catalogue Record, (2017), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129239?lookfor=barka%20herel&offset=1&max=1>.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

The *chine collé* print near the centre of the book depicts the barge of Tsaloumas' poetry (Fig. 11 b-c). The spread is layered—underneath, an oceanic wash of colour similar to the aforementioned pages, which then continues over the page to join the new print. The barge sits in the bottom third of the page, on water. Above it, the sky is filled with a heavily lined grid. To be a barge on the ocean is to presumably have a clear idea of where one is, where one came from and where one is going. Conventionally, to travel is to leave a location and arrive at a destination. To travel by sea requires navigation. Yet this vessel is depicted in the middle of ambiguous water—there is no hint of final destination, or of place just left. Consequently, the barge appears to the viewer as in the middle of its journey, in the middle of open sea. Indeed the poem itself, though referring to water as a river, references this idea of barge being lost in the middle of nowhere: "For search/as they may, they find neither river nor barge/by map and compass in the broad light of day". This is a barge resting in the liminal in-between.

Imagery of the barge is prevalent in Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Norse mythology. In Ancient Greece, a figure named Charon was recognised as the 'ferryman of the dead'.<sup>606</sup> Particularly popular in fifth century art and literature, Charon would transport souls to the underworld in his vessel, guided by Hermes across the otherwise unpassable Styx or Acheron.<sup>607</sup> This trip marked transition from the realm of the living to that of the dead. The boat ride was a symbolic crossing over, and Charon and his vessel rested in what can be described an in-between space. In Ancient Egyptian mythology, the sun god Ra navigated his boat along the great river of the sky that moved through heaven.<sup>608</sup> His vessel would bring sun and warmth to the land below, and was known as the 'Boat of Millions of Years', reflecting its diligent, tireless work.<sup>609</sup> This was a vessel that transported the essentials of life through various spiritual realms, again moving in a space between mortal and holy. Finally, of the many boats throughout Norse mythology, *Skithblathnir* was that of Frey, the god of the sun and the rain. This boat was magically able to expand to carry all of the gods and their weaponry, and when no longer required could shrink to be pocket-sized.<sup>610</sup> Similar to Ra's 'Boat of Millions of Years', *Skithblathnir* was able to navigate on land and through the sky, and once in the air was imagined as a cloud bringing change, fertility and growth.<sup>611</sup> Again, this vessel was one that, while maintaining some realistic characteristics of a barge, was magically transformed to perform other tasks between

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<sup>606</sup> Francis A. Sullivan, "Charon, the Ferryman of the Dead," *The Classical Journal* 46 (1950), 11.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> M. A. Murray, *Legends of Ancient Egypt* (Mineola: Dover Publications Inc, 2000), 50.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

<sup>610</sup> Tamra Andrews, *Dictionary of Nature Myths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 182.

<sup>611</sup> Tamra Andrews, *Dictionary of Nature Myths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 182.

realms. Spanning across various mythologies, all three of these notable barges mesh the physical vessel with fantastical qualities, stories and powers.

Upon closer consideration, while the history of the barge immediately suggests movement, travel, and navigation, the barge in Herel's example is curiously still. The line of brown shadow below the vessel suggests it is not moving. The barge might be moored in the middle of nowhere for a period of rest, or perhaps this liminal space is indeed its final destination. Even more challenging is to use this brown line to view the barge as floating above the water, its suspended base creating the shadow seen on the water's surface. The barge is suddenly uprooted from any known reality as it hovers above the sea, its assumed movement now unpredictable and possibly entirely stagnant. Another viewing made possible by this provocative shadow line is that the barge is indeed floating, but in incredibly shallow water. This mark could be the barge's shadow on the ocean floor, this perspective confusingly meaning the boat should not even be floating at all in so little water. Though the boat is now resting on the water's surface rather than hovering above it, there is still a strong sense of the vessel being tensely suspended. All three of these interpretations are confronting, and all three interact with ideas of movement, stagnancy, belonging and timelessness.

Herel's work engages with timelessness by encouraging the act of return—the artist wants viewers not to 'read' his books chronologically, but move throughout them in a fluid manner. In this sense, timelessness, a-chronicity and non-linearity are analogous. This is facilitated by the artist's subtle depiction of texts in a variety of languages, and different iterations of a plate printed at different places throughout different works. This fluidity, this compulsion to return, results in works that are a never-ending interpretive experience. Borges addresses this idea of never-ending book in his work *The Book of Sand*, identified by Herel as a source of particular inspiration.<sup>612</sup> Borges tells the story of a narrator approached by a bookseller with an entirely unique book. Though seemingly conventional at first glance, the seller challenges the narrator to pick a random page and try to find it again after closing the book. As Borges writes: "I noted my place and closed the book. At once, I re-opened it. Page by page, in vain, I looked for the illustration of the anchor".<sup>613</sup> The narrator is entirely unable to return to the same page. He is told that the codex is called 'The Book of Sand', "because neither book nor sand has any beginning or end".<sup>614</sup> So, too, is it

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<sup>612</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, 20 March, 2017.

<sup>613</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Sand* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 88.

<sup>614</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Sand* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 89.



impossible to find the first or last page of *The Book of Sand*.<sup>615</sup> The book is never-ending; is simultaneously a tangible object in the present time but also one that presents timelessness. Though the narrator comes to hate the book for the obsession he develops with it, forfeiting all sense of time in his own life to pore over the endless pages, the bookseller makes a poignant comment before leaving: “If space is infinite, we may be at any point in space. If time is infinite, we may be at any point in time”.<sup>616</sup> The book is not only an object but an opportunity to question the very nature of time and the possibility of timelessness. Like *The Book Of Sand*, each of Herel’s work interrogates these questions.<sup>617</sup>

A provocative visual element of the barge print in *Bárka* is the grid sky overhead. This methodical, repetitive and evenly spaced composition leads the grid to appear like the lines found on a detailed navigational map. And yet, there are no features clearly marked on this map. There is a group of small, circular marks sprinkled across the grid, but no indication is given as to what these might represent, if they represent anything at all. Herel presents the viewer with an image that includes familiar cartographic formatting, and yet does not present the conventional information that might subsequently be expected. Having interpreted Herel’s work through a lens of belonging and cartography, *Bárka* introduces another significant theme in Herel’s work—that of ‘nowhere’. As his work interrogates the expectation of information communicated by a book, and the expectation of place and orientation when looking at a map, Herel’s work uses these subversions to depict spaces and places that are unclear, uncomfortable, and unknown.<sup>618</sup>

Using *Bárka* to further elaborate on the depiction of nowhere, it is important to consider the segment of conventional map used within the primary *chine collé* print. The body of the barge is composed of a map, distinguishable by its familiarly thin, topographical lines, small, repetitive symbols and degrees marking latitude and longitude. In keeping with conventional ideas of maps depicting place, I am drawn to read the italicised text to the left of the vessel: ‘Dingo Claypan’. Another fragment of text, ‘Claypan’ (in bold type) is partially hidden underneath Herel’s scratchy, brown outline of the boat. The focal point of

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<sup>615</sup> Borges writes: “I laid my left hand on the cover and, trying to put my thumb on the flyleaf, I opened the book. It was useless. Every time I tried, a number of pages came between the cover and my thumb. It was as if they kept growing from the book”.

Ibid.

<sup>616</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>617</sup> Christ writes of Borges’ prevalent interest in time and return: “hence we return to the central, inescapable point: Borges’ allusions are an abbreviated demonstration of the Eternal Return, of the mind timelessly turning upon its own universal experience, of ‘everything happening at once’...”

Ronald J. Christ, *The Narrow Act: Borges’ Art of Allusion* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 41.

<sup>618</sup> Herel comments that he is particularly drawn to maps of deserts, explaining that he finds beauty in their emptiness.

Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

the barge is not this text, but a large red circle outlined by textured brown shading. This could be the portal referenced in the poem, the place where captain or poet rests.<sup>619</sup> However, considering its placement on a conventional map, this shape could also be indicating the significance of the area on which it rests. The mark is opaque, leaving me unable to make out any specific characteristics of the land underneath.

I am led to question whether this boat and its passengers are not only in the middle of nowhere, but also in the middle of nowhere on land. A boat stranded on the ground, taken out of its usual context. Both captain and poet rest in the hands of this liminal space inhabited and depicted by the barge. While this map fragment does contain text, the ‘Dingo Claypan’ it identifies is unknown to the naïve viewer, and conjures imagery of the great expanse of the Australian outback. The mountains and hilly terrain marked on the map are not immediately identifiable, and so in its lack of specificity the map also becomes a depiction of nowhere. I am given some information, but not enough to entirely understand, to find my own footing on this map. Through its subject matter, *Bárka* inherently suggests belonging and way finding, but simultaneously presents ideas of stagnation, timelessness, and nowhere.

### *Nowhere*

Herel’s work engages with the concept and visualisation of nowhere in two ways: through the depiction of maps of nowhere, and by depicting one’s travel to or descent from nowhere. As introduced by analysis of *Bárka*, Herel plays with traditional cartography to present the idea of undefinable, unlocatable place—nowhere. This is also evident in the work *Sisteme = Systèmes = Systems* (2011). Featuring poetry by Antjie Krog (1952-) in the original Afrikaans, alongside translations in French and English, the book was published by French bookbinder Monique Mathieu.<sup>620</sup> Herel has contributed two engravings to the work, one in greyscale and one in colour, printed on Thai mulberry paper.<sup>621</sup> Each of Herel’s prints is different, but engages with similar subject matter and iconography. The coloured print is half bright orange and half murky green (Fig. 12a). At the bottom of the page rests a three-dimensional star that projects a large shadow on the spatial plane behind it. This plane might be interpreted as a map—it features a slightly curvaceous grid reminiscent of the lines encircling a globe. At the bottom of this ‘map’ appears an ambiguous, darker mass that fades into the surrounding ink, perhaps marking the shore of

<sup>619</sup> National Library of Australia, “Bárka = The Barge,” Catalogue Record, (2017),

<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129239?lookfor=barka%20herel&offset=1&max=1>.

<sup>620</sup> National Library of Australia, “Sisteme = Systèmes = Systems,” Catalogue Record, (2017),

<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129237?lookfor=herel%20systemes&offset=1&max=2>.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

an aerial coastline. Identifying this plane as a map challenges the perspective of the entire page. The star appears to stand on the ground, with several smaller forms standing next to it, each with their own shadow. Yet the map suggests an aerial view, meaning that Herel is presenting two vastly different perspectives condensed together. Perhaps this is a map pinned to a wall behind the desk holding these objects, or perhaps I am looking out of a window, the landscape superimposed with grid lines. Regardless of which perspective the viewer wishes to see, all of these interpretations involve the notion of cartography, though nothing is explicitly communicated. This is a map of nowhere.

The black and white print in *Système = Systèmes = Systems* similarly features both three-dimensional star and grid lines (Fig. 12b). In this engraving, Herel has placed a sheet of gridding in front of and behind the star, as if the form is trapped between the two sheets. The background spatial plane is lighter than that in the coloured print, but no less ambiguous. Darker shapes move through lighter, cloudy forms like ocean currents or a fire moving fast through bushland. The curved lines of the grid suggest traditional cartography and navigation, yet the image below these organisational grids depicts nothing concrete. The star sits in the place conventionally occupied by an explanatory key. Rather than an aerial map, this print could also be viewed as a scene looking out of a windowpane. If this is the case, the lines can be interpreted as an attempt to codify the exterior landscape, and a demonstration of the impossibility in attempting to do so. Whether this print is viewed as a map or as a landscape from a window, both interpretations depict the unknowable.

The duality of place and nowhere that permeates Herel's artists' books can be productively examined in reference to Borges' fascination with the double.<sup>622</sup> Herel's ability to demand that the viewer reflect upon the act of interpretation itself specifically relates to the parable *Borges and I* (1960).<sup>623</sup> The narrator seems to simultaneously be Borges and be writing about Borges from the perspective of an outsider. He comments:

I like hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typography, the taste of coffee and the prose of Stevenson; he shares these preferences, but in a vain way that turns them into the attributes of an actor.<sup>624</sup>

Through the parable, Borges experiments with the idea of seeing yourself, and attempting to understand yourself, from an exterior perspective. He questions how someone might view him from the outside, given only the descriptive details of his personality and physical

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<sup>622</sup> J.E.I., "Introduction," in *Labyrinths*, by Jorge Luis Borges (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 2011), 18.

<sup>623</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 2011), 282-283.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

characteristics. The duality here is that of being Borges but also analysing him through the eyes of another person. The author demonstrates the ability to step outside oneself to analyse the way one interacts with the world from an exterior perspective, and emphasises the complex duality of self and other.

### *Oblivion*

Examining the prevalence of timelessness and nowhere in Herel's work, I argue that one can then transform the idea of a nostalgia for timelessness to an engagement with a nostalgia for oblivion. Oblivion is defined as "the state or fact of forgetting or having forgotten...freedom from care or worry".<sup>625</sup> Herel himself has acknowledged his lack of interest in the physical, contemporary world, demonstrated by previous comments in which the artist claims a longstanding disinterest with the 'real world'.<sup>626</sup> By engaging with timelessness, and oblivion, Herel and his work instead sink into a metaphysical realm of poetry and the surreal. Oblivion is a state of freedom from typical cares or worries, like that of time pressures. By ridding oneself of specific time restraints, Herel's books act as a portal through which the viewer enters this new conceptual space. If there is no time in this interpretive space, then everything occurs in the present, reflected by the heightened self-awareness and physicality felt when interacting with Herel's work. Perhaps this is Herel's version of de Chardin's 'omega point', the central point around which everything else whirlpools.<sup>627</sup> This centre is a melting point of references, influences and personal imagery, all mixing together without delineation or limiting classification.

The presence of nowhere and oblivion in Herel's work can be further analysed iconographically through the pervasive presence of ladders. The 2008 book *Longing for the Earth* features an English translation of Jules Supervielle's (1884-1960) *Le Regret de la Terre*.<sup>628</sup> *Longing* was created in memoriam for Bouchard, and includes an older 1974 print *Être Evenant dans le Devenir de Chute* (Fig. 13).<sup>629</sup> Like *The Nine Doors to Your Body* (2011), this print is uncharacteristic of Herel's oeuvre as it features a realistic depiction of the human body. On the right side of the print, a human foot negotiates the rungs of a ladder leading off the page. Symbolically, this ladder represents the travel between spaces, and the objects, spaces and actions in between. This foot is not attached to the leg wearing dark pants

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<sup>625</sup> "Oblivion," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/129744?rskey=jVRiI4&result=1#eid>

<sup>626</sup> Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, March 20, 2017.

<sup>627</sup> See Chapter Two for a thorough examination of de Chardin's theory in relation to Herel's work.

<sup>628</sup> National Library of Australia, "Longing for the Earth," Catalogue Record, (2017), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129236?lookfor=longing%20for%20the%20earth%20herel&offset=1&max=66546>.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid.

nearby, as first glance might suggest, but is in fact a dismembered form. The darkness above the ankle is indeed the dark cosmic atmosphere of the background, rather than a part of the trousers. Herel has rendered this foot anonymous, a foot that by belonging to no one could be anybody's.

By choosing to depict this moment of movement in a printed image, Herel has frozen action. I am unable to immediately distinguish whether the climber is ascending or descending this ladder. Upon further examination, it could be concluded the climber is moving upwards, as the ladder below has entirely fractured off. The climber battles the swathes of material that attempt to pull the ladder off the right edge of the page—this is not an easy journey, as the foot fights against multi-directional forces. At the bottom of the ladder, in the distance, Herel includes a planetary circle. This planet is surrounded by a dark atmosphere, decorated with visceral scratches and organic stains. The composition of the print leads me to question where the climber might be travelling to, if they have recently left the only clear form in the frame, the planet, behind. The body is directed upwards, further into the darkness. This traveller has been caught in a moment of travel into the unknown—into nowhere, into oblivion. In the poem *Inventory* (undated) Borges writes: “To reach it, a ladder has to be set up. There is no stair./What can we be looking for in the attic/but the accumulation of disorder?”<sup>630</sup> In this case, disorder might not be chaotic but free of the restraints of conventional thinking. This figure is leaving the tangible present behind, and the broken ladder suggests no possibility of easy return. Perhaps this image represents the movement of Bouchard himself from mortal realm to the unknowable. As death rids you of material concerns, you become timeless, resting in a space of nowhere or oblivion.

The title given to the print included in *Longing* indicates the thematic significance of nowhere in Herel's artist book practice. According to the National Library of Australia catalogue, *Être Devenant dans le Devenir de Chute* translates to ‘our being coming into being as it falls’.<sup>631</sup> This is a line taken from French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's (1884-1962) text *La Terre et les Réveries de la Volonté* (*Earth and Reveries of Will*), published in 1948.<sup>632</sup> In the context of Herel's oeuvre, it is necessary to consider the application of such a line to ideas of belonging, timelessness and nowhere. For one's being to come into being as it falls, the

<sup>630</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *The Book of Sand* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 147.

<sup>631</sup> The National Library credits this translation to Kenneth Haltman.

Gaston Bachelard and Kenneth Haltman, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Dallas Ins Humanities & Culture, 2002), 271.

National Library of Australia, “Longing for the Earth,” Catalogue Record, (2017),

<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129236?lookfor=longing%20for%20the%20earth%20herel&offset=1&max=66546>.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid., National Library of Australia.

significant part of the journey is not the beginning location or end destination, but the liminal space of travel in between the two. One's being finds itself when falling, as it might when climbing a ladder or in the middle of the empty sea on a boat. This nowhere space is not easily communicated or defined. As an object, or in this case a 'being', is falling, it is a fast moving thing. To freeze that moment, to contemplate the fall, is to apply a timelessness to that thing. There is a heightened awareness of this fleeting moment as it becomes frozen in time. Falling from the sky or climbing a ladder into it, the in-between moment is steeped in meaning.

The presence and subsequent loss of Bouchard is marked throughout Herel's practice, from time spent collaborating on Labyrinth Press to works such as *Longing for the Earth* that mark his death. References to his life explicitly engage with memory, nostalgia, presence, and absence. No work speaks to this feeling more than *Sous le Chêne* (2006-2008), with poetry by Gaston Puel (1924-2013). During the same year as Bouchard's death, Herel visited his studio, taking rubbings from the text of a poem still on the typographer's press.<sup>633</sup> Herel remembers that Bouchard's widow and stepfather helped to hold the paper down as he worked, a memory that invests the scene with a sense of ceremony or family ritual.<sup>634</sup> It is this rubbing process that gives the text an appropriately ethereal quality—this is text that was not destined to be finished, appearing delicate and hazy (Fig. 14a-b). These pages are photocopies of the original rubbings, which generates a further sense of fuzzy static, of words that are somewhat legible but in their haziness are not firmly rooted on the page as other typeset text might be. These letters are ephemeral. After taking the rubbings, Herel created two drawings for the book that resemble simple gravestones (Fig. 14c). These stones tilt away from each other, as if they too, like the text, are not anchored to the page. *Sous le Chêne* is an exemplary study in the influence and presence of nostalgia, memory, presence and nothingness in Herel's artist book practice. While Bouchard had passed away, Herel created a tangible, tactile work that continues to evoke his presence, and also comments upon the fragility of image, text, and the book itself.

Returning to the ladder as symbol of nowhere and oblivion, the form is a recurrent symbol throughout Herel's oeuvre, as seen in the work *Fenêtres la Nuit Vient* (1987), created more than 20 years before *Longing*. The book was published by Yves Prié of *Les Éditions Folle Avoine* in Rennes, and features poetry by French poet Pascal Commère (1951-).<sup>635</sup> Herel has

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<sup>633</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, July 2017.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

<sup>635</sup> National Library of Australia, "Longing for the Earth," Catalogue Record, (2017), <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129236?lookfor=longing%20for%20the%20earth%20herel&offset=1&max=66546>.

contributed two woodcut prints in response to the poetry. The first depicts a scene reminiscent of the childhood game 'Snakes and Ladders', as the print resembles a board divided into a grid (Fig. 15a-b). Ladders lead from the bottom squares to those above. The most clearly defined ladder is one in the bottom left segment, which leads up and into a black hole or void. Like *Longing*, this can be interpreted as a reference to travel to the unknown, an acknowledgement of oblivion. This portal represents the unfamiliar, a doorway into nothing and nowhere. Other ladders throughout the print lead to nowhere in a different fashion. In the bottom right hand area, a dark ladder reaches its end in the middle of empty space—there is no discernible final destination when climbing this construction. By referencing childhood scenes of play, Herel's imagery uses an innocent, game-like format to demand that the naïve eye see beyond travelling across the board. Herel encourages travel into it.

Herel's depiction of staircases is an extension of the concept of ladders to nowhere. The book *Rosedale* (1989) features only a single etching. Herel depicts a still life scene including a pear, flag, wooden toy horse, single die, and a grouping of four spindly pine trees (Fig. 16a-b). Behind the pear is a small staircase with an underpass archway. This staircase is a removed object—it does not lead to anywhere. It is an object of its own significance, rather than a method of reaching some significant place. If a small climber was to negotiate the path, they would find themselves at the peak looking out onto nothing. This staircase to nowhere is reminiscent of the architectural features of M. C. Escher (1898-1972), of staircases that led to further stairs, looping around in a tortuous, never-ending labyrinth of the artist's own creation. In this print, Herel continues to present the idea of an end location of nowhere, emphasising the significance of the paths one takes in reaching these final destinations.

Analysing Petr Herel's artist book oeuvre using ideas of cartography, nostalgia, way finding and nowhere is demonstrably necessary for developing a thorough understanding of the artist's work. Importantly, these concepts expand to include an examination of the artist's book through the lens of psychogeography, providing the opportunity to apply new concepts of the *flâneur* and the labyrinth to Herel's work. Proposing a geography of the artist's book marks the creation of a new manner of interpreting the book as aberrant art object that further emphasises subjective and experiential analysis. While the book is a tangible object in hand, additionally, I argue it necessary to examine ideas of nowhere and oblivion in relation to the artist's book. This facilitates another pathway to articulate Herel's notable engagement with the unknown and unknowable, concepts that are otherwise difficult to comprehensively discuss. I have innovatively demonstrated that

Herel's artist book practice challenges and expands notions of the map, engaging with much more than conventional location, expanding to a larger examination of found place and way finding, here and nowhere. To interpret the aberrant artist's book is an open-ended journey that spans time, place, and planes of existence.



## Conclusion

The last time I wrote of *Carnet d'un Malade* (1979) I spent an extended amount of time considering the title page—its overwhelming negative space, the slopes and angles of the handwritten title. This text was dynamic, fluid, moving. It projected a sense of both physical and metaphysical movement, as though the ill person whose notebook this was were in the very final throes of fading away—disappearing mid-action, partway through their inscription. There was also an ambiguous form on the page that did not immediately identify itself, defying the conventional promise of a book to communicate clear meaning. In my notes from that first physical encounter, I wrote: "...Herel has left me staring into a void". To then encounter this book through a computer screen presents a new experimental opportunity to reflect upon recent developments in artist book access and display, and ask the questions: what next for the artist's book, and the art historian's relationship with such work?

Through the screen, the pages of *Carnet d'un Malade* appear smoother, more uniform—reminiscent of the pages of an e-reader (Fig. 1). I am denied the use of my body as a point of reference, the book unable to remind me of its materiality, its physical presence. I attempt to spend an extended period of time looking at the same title page, but am distracted by the navigational buttons and an awareness of the other materials I am interacting with in place of paper: plastic, glass, rubber (Fig. 2). This experience feels crowded, not intimate like the previous encounter with this imagery, book in hand. Compared to sitting with Herel and looking at the work in his Melbourne home, sitting here at my desk lacks a sense of intimacy. There is no physical act of revelation in this instance, the book simply accessed through the click of a removed, disposable, plastic button. After demonstrating the necessity of an experiential, subjective, and phenomenological analysis of the artist's book, it is jarring to think of Herel's works being 'accessed simply'. I, the viewer, have been distanced from the object.

Though only minutes into this experimental analysis, observations that arise from this attempt to analyse the digitised artist's book question how my understanding of *Carnet d'un Malade*, having turned through its pages in person, might differ from that of the viewer who will only ever see it online. Digitisation obfuscates the fruitful complexity of the artist's book. This argument works to further emphasise the significance of my argument articulating the artist's book as aberrant object—phenomenological, experiential, subjective, tactile, and intimate. As demonstrated by notes from this experiment of slow

looking at a digital copy of *Carnet d'un Malade*, engaging with the artist's book as aberrant object, rather than one simplified by the screen, is crucial to understanding.

Over the last three years, the period marking this research, several institutions notably invested in artist book display and access. Launching in 2015, the Melbourne Art Book Fair is an annual event organised by the National Gallery of Victoria. Since its inaugural event, the event has garnered over 50,000 visitors, and welcomes both local and international publishers, makers, and enthusiasts to several days of stalls, seminars, launches and networking events.<sup>636</sup> Importantly, this extended event works to promote the presence of the book in art practice, both as a creative disseminator of information and as an art object itself. While the scale and crowded nature of the Fair may make the possibility of an intimate encounter with books difficult, it does importantly allow viewers to have a physical experience of the works through touch. Relevant to this research, which argued that engaging with the artist's book is a larger interaction between artist, object, and viewer, the Fair also provides an opportunity for viewers to discuss works with their respective makers, thus establishing a tangible link between the hand that creates and the hand that receives.

More recently, there have also been a number of exhibitions and proposed shows relating to the artist's book, particularly in Melbourne at the University of Melbourne's Baillieu Library and State Library of Victoria. From 1 August 2017-14 January 2018, the Noel Shaw Gallery at the Baillieu will display works from the Rare Book Collection tracing "the links between the twentieth century European illustrated book tradition and the contemporary Australian context" in *Art on the page*.<sup>637</sup> Herel's work will be on display next to books by other Australian artists including Bruno Leti and Peter Lyssiotis, and international artists including Henri Matisse, Joan Miro and Sonia Delaunay.<sup>638</sup> This will importantly expose and contextualise Herel's polyglot presence as part of the European tradition of the book as well as the dissemination of the genre within Australia. While I have demonstrated that conventional display practices negate the inherent aberrance of the artist's book, exhibitions such as these do play an important role in promoting an awareness of the book as art object.

The State Library of Victoria continues to be a significant Australian institution promoting the artist's book, with the exhibition *World of the book* (10 November 2017-31 December

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<sup>636</sup> National Gallery of Victoria, "Melbourne Art Book Fair," National Gallery of Victoria, 2017, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/whats-on/programs-events/art-book-fair/>.

<sup>637</sup> The University of Melbourne, "Art on the Page," The University of Melbourne, 2017, <http://library.unimelb.edu.au/news-and-events/art-on-the-page>.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

2018) a long-running display tracing the histories of bookmaking and design that includes artists' books.<sup>639</sup> Even more focussed was *Self-made: zines and artist books* (11 August 2017-12 November 2017), curated by Monica Syrette.<sup>640</sup> Finally, in the iconic La Trobe Reading Room's central glass cabinets, from August to November 2017 visitors will be able to view Gracia Haby and Louise Jennison's installation of five of their artists' books in *Looped: artist books in the round*.<sup>641</sup> As the exhibition description states: "...each glass-panelled cabinet case around the domed reading room's original heritage dais becomes a page," marking an innovative approach to the display and viewer navigation of the artist's book.<sup>642</sup> This attitude of experimental display suggests that once accepting the aberrant nature of the artist's book, as articulated by this dissertation, conventional sites may be able to move towards exhibitivite practices that engage with the artist's book's previously ineffable intimate and temporal qualities.

Most pertinent to this research, the National Library of Australia in Canberra is currently developing a new, virtual approach to artist book access with the digitisation of works created by Herel and Thierry Bouchard under Labyrinth Press. From the online catalogue, users are already able to navigate through high-quality images of some works.<sup>643</sup> Each of these images comprises a double page spread, the interface allowing viewers to zoom in and out, scrolling or clicking their way through the book (Fig. 3).

This recent digital development provides the valuable opportunity to not only note changes in artist book access and display but also critique this approach to reiterate the necessity of analysing the artist's book in an intimate, physical context. Importantly, at a time when digital advancement is being enthusiastically adopted by institutions, this research emphasises the active effort Herel's work makes to not engage with the artist's so called 'age of immediacy'.<sup>644</sup> Attempting to undertake an exercise in slow looking at *Carnet d'un Malade* through the screen, I have re-created the digital environment designed by the

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<sup>639</sup> State Library of Victoria, "World of the Book," State Library of Victoria, 2017, <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/whats-on/world-book>.

<sup>640</sup> State Library of Victoria, "Self-Made: Zines and Artist Books," State Library of Victoria, 2017, <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/whats-on/self-made-zines-artist-books>.

<sup>641</sup> State Library of Victoria, "Looped: Artist Books in the Round," State Library of Victoria, 2017, <https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/whats-on/looped-artist-books-round>.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> For example, see the digitisation of *Sur le pont Charles* (1997):

National Library of Australia, "Sur Le Pont Charles = Na Karlově Mostě," Catalogue Record, 2017, <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129240?lookfor=sur%20le%20pont%20charles&offset=1&max=234966>.

<sup>644</sup> Petr Herel, Interview with the Artist, May 2015.

It is necessary to note that Herel has agreed to the National Library's digitisation project of the Labyrinth Press works, however it is important to demonstrate that to engage with digital copies as a primary source is to lose understanding of such works' complexity. These works were not originally created as digital artists' books.

National Library. As the book is one of two unique impressions, both in the artist's personal collection, I have taken my own images of the work and created a photographic slideshow of the book (Fig. 4a). Just as I opened this dissertation by interacting with *Carnet d'une Malade*, so will I mark its end.

Having experienced Herel's books in hand, I find myself immediately reflecting upon the complex qualities of the artist's book identified in this dissertation that are lost in digital translation. The book on the screen does not project the sense of aberrance I have argued crucial to understanding the artist's book, characterised by concepts of tactility, emotion and temporality that jar with conventional art histories. As I click through images of its pages, *Carnet d'un Malade* does not immediately lead me to interrogate the book as art object, as it did in person. I am not left questioning how to engage with this work, not left considering the impact of a perceived need to classify to understand. Instead, images on the screen become homogenous, like those I scroll through on the internet and social media. There is no sense of the object's presence here.

This dissertation had demonstrated that much of the artist's book's aberrance can be attributed to its emphasis of the physical qualities of the book. In this instance, on the screen, this sense of the object has been entirely removed. I attempt to engage with other aspects of the artist's book's complexity identified in my research—the book as simultaneously open and closed, the act of revelatory seeing, the opportunity to reflect upon the act of interpretation itself through a heightened awareness of the physical gestures of reading. As I move through images, *Carnet d'un Malade* does not embody any of these qualities, qualities I know to be present when engaging with the work in person. Attempting to engage with the artist's book's aberrance on screen demonstrates digitisation's inability to capture crucial aspects of Herel's work discussed throughout my research, thus denying the opportunity to thoroughly engage with the artist's book's complexity.

I continue clicking my way through images of *Carnet d'un Malade's* pages, attempting to spend more time with each page (Fig. 4b). I find this increasingly difficult, my lack of typing and frenzied mouse movements during slow looking causing my computer screen to go dark, to 'go to sleep'. It is as if the technology is actively protesting a slow approach. Yet this book requires temporal analysis to create the opportunity to engage with all of the elements that contribute to its specificity. In Chapter Two, I developed a methodology that combined touch, Jennifer Roberts' slow looking, and T.J. Clark's repeated viewing to reinstate the intrinsic phenomenological qualities of the book necessary to understanding.

My inclusion of experimental field notes and subsequent reflections demonstrated that subjective and academic is a false dichotomy, and provided a tangible example as to how an informed subjective analysis can be structured. By subverting the typical contents of the codex, Herel's books require the viewer to engage with a new paradigm of the book as a temporal, experiential, and embodied art object. This is a rich new opportunity for analysis of the artist's book, a new entry point to engage with difficult, nebulous objects with seemingly ineffable, affective qualities.

I try again to consider the digitised version of *Carnet d'un Malade* through a temporal lens. Along with the screen repeatedly turning dark and requiring re-activation (a movement that sharply interrupts my train of thought), other notifications keep popping up: I have one new Facebook message, my battery will need recharging soon, would I like to update to the latest software? I am distracted. The doorway to the object created by temporal analysis has entirely disappeared.

With the computer screen as medium, I am constantly encouraged to work at a faster pace, to ingest information quickly and make decisions—multitasking. I think of my hands, of touching the book as I have done throughout my research. While the computer mouse is a removed intercessor, when touching a book in person my hands are not a simple go-between. Holding one of Herel's books, leafing between pages and running my fingers over binding and deckle edges, is very much an embodied experience. I am an active part of the interpretive process. By denying touch and the material presence of the object, the digital screen strips aspects of performance I have demonstrated necessary to understanding the book as art object—the relationship between artist, object and interpreter. Through the screen, I become a mere user rather an active participant. Yet as this research has demonstrated, and opposed to using my clicking and scrolling hands as mere arbitrators, using my body clearly benefits interpretation. This encounter, looking at a page from *Carnet d'un Malade*, is not one that requires cold arbitration. Integral to the intimacy of the book as art object, I have demonstrated that this is instead a moment for poetic, subjective, and experiential response. This is a moment for affective, active engagement.

I consider this digitised version of *Carnet d'un Malade* drawing from my application of Surrealist concepts as a framework to engage with the aberrant complexities of Herel's work. In the interest of a fair critique of the digitised experience of the artist's book, I have moved my computer into a quieter room, plugged in the recharge cord and adjusted my screen's sleep settings. I hope this will make interpretation more like that in a quiet library, or as I first experienced the book in Herel's Melbourne home. Considering Surrealism, and

inspired by the decision to adapt my space to create a more focussed interpretive environment, I reflect upon the poetic qualities of the object. The surreal *crise d'objet* worked to poetically subvert tradition, to reassess convention and celebrate the marvellous of the everyday. I have demonstrated that Herel's works do much the same, confronting the viewer a recognisable form transformed into holistic art object.

Yet in this instance, while the physical artist's book has been reassessed into a digital format, this transformation strips the book of its core aberrance, the link between Surrealism and Herel's work severed. This transformation is a step too far, a step that rather than embracing a freedom from conventional understanding, has transformed *Carnet d'un Malade* into one of many—a digital file denied the ability to challenge us with its aberrance. Though I have made efforts to change my surroundings to enhance the essential poetic moment of encountering the artist's book, my lack of open-ended questioning here reflects the digital copy's inability to instil a sense of poetry in the moment. The tantalising, and interpretively rich, sense of surreal shock, discombobulation, discomfort, surprise, and experimentation I have demonstrated key to the artist's book becomes a ruffle smoothed out by the unfeeling screen.

I move on, scrolling through images to consider the visual presence of text in Herel's work viewed digitally. When looking at *Carnet d'un Malade* at Herel's home, I ran my fingers over the smudged writing on the title page. Its gestural presence inspired a gestural response, and on the page my fingers physically connected with the material ink and the delicate indents marking Herel's movements during inscription. My fieldnotes reflected upon the physical presence of handwriting and the intimate, diaristic associations it inspired, as discussed in Chapter Four with my argument for a formal analysis of text. Now, on the screen, while I am still able to discern that this text is handwritten, my removal from the physical object also removes the scrawl's intimate quality (Fig. 4c). On the screen, I can flick between pages and writing endlessly, the text given the option of being copied infinitely. Here, handwriting has become a font.

My experiential experiment with the digitised *Carnet d'un Malade* is reaching its final stages. During this sitting, I am more aware of time, but have not become engrossed in the book enough that it has moved quickly. Instead, I feel as though I have been clutching at straws, unable to find any specific qualities of the artist's book that digitisation enables or encourages an examination of. Reflected by the arguments of this dissertation, I am now particularly conscious of how rich a site the artist's book can be. This encounter has been disappointing. Distance renders a consideration of the geography of the book explored in

Chapter Five tenuous, as it does not present a physical terrain to explore. Without the book in hand, it is also difficult to draw upon nostalgia, as this seems an embodied feeling that cannot be associated with the removed image of work on the screen. Nostalgia, belonging and wayfinding—at their core, these are notions necessarily linked in Herel’s work to connections with other people and their presence. *Carnet d’un Malade* was created during a period when Herel was very ill and unable to speak, this work becoming the artist’s sole vessel of communication and expression. Furthermore, works such as this will certainly outlive the artist’s life, living on as markers of creative expression and, at their core, existence. In Herel’s case, his books represent personally significant and sustained relationships with poets, artists, craftsman, writers and texts. Herel’s work, imbued with a metaphysical questioning of life, is arguably stripped of its poetic presence when digitised. Certainly, looking at my digital images of *Carnet d’un Malade*, I do not feel the sense of depth and weight as when experiencing the work in person. The open-ended nature of the aberrant artist’s book is made into a simple, sortable, programmable file, with the ability to manipulate the work and my experience of it to be easy and comfortable. This entirely denies the open-ended, nebulous, and ultimately aberrant nature of the artist’s book.

While my attempt to slow look at *Carnet d’un Malade* exposes issues in the digital display of artist’s books, it constructively emphasises the value of the arguments made throughout this dissertation for a phenomenological, subjective, and experiential analysis of Herel’s work and the artist’s book at large. Digitisation does present some obvious benefits, such as access for those who cannot travel to Herel’s works and providing images for later reference. Books are also physical objects, subject to deterioration and change, and so digitised files are helpful sources in recording such objects at various stages of their lives. However, it is necessary that we consciously use this material as a record rather than as the work itself. These records are a practical measure, but not an authoritative replacement. Digitisation has changed the object, transformed the artist’s book into a different artefact. The analysis of a digital rendition of *Carnet d’un Malade* clearly demonstrates that the art historian’s understanding of the physical artist’s book must be informed using the experiential analysis outlined by my research—to do otherwise would strip analysis of the aberrant complexities of the artist’s book so integral to understanding.

In closing, and looking forward, it is important to note that not only does this dissertation mark a new examination of Herel’s work and the artist’s book more broadly, it also has the distinct possibility of being applied as a case study to challenge the way art history thinks about other objects that do not fit easily into the canonical narrative. This research interrogates the place of the experiential, tactile, and subjective art object within art history

and cultural institutions. It critiques current practices of collection, display, and analysis, before demonstrating that by identifying an object as aberrant art history can undertake interpretation that results in affective analysis. Such analysis is necessary when dealing with objects that intrinsically engage with the phenomenological. Using a paradigm of aberrance demonstrably opens up current scholarship to contemporary experimentation, forging a new pathway for development. This dissertation exposes, examines, and demonstrates the analytical possibility of the aberrant object.

It is heartening to imagine the wealth of scholarship to be generated by applying this research to other art objects that sit uncomfortably within collections, curatorship, and the canon. This research provides a crucial, tangible framework for approaching such objects on the fringes, presenting a methodology that can be used as a tool for critical discourse, teaching, and institutional access. While they may not facilitate immediate understanding, and indeed in some cases intentionally obfuscate clear meaning, objects such as the artist's book are undeniably works of art that have been consciously created, and are deserving of attention. Indeed, as revealed by this dissertation, study of the artist's book can move beyond a desire to categorically understand to embrace a more open-ended encounter with the book that generates understanding. It is the art historian's responsibility to acknowledge aberrance and develop new frameworks to address objects like Herel's books that demand a different approach. The artists' books of Czech-born Australian artist Petr Herel are complex, challenging, wondrous, and aberrant objects. To be an aberrant object is not to be an abhorrent object or avoided object. To be an aberrant object is first to be, crucially, acknowledged, and it is from this foundational point that I hope to have shown that the art historian can generate new contemporary methodologies, discussion and understanding that critically engages with the previously ineffable.



## Appendix

### Appendix 1

*Herel's artists' books and livres pauvres*<sup>645</sup>

#### Artists' books

- Josef Hora, *Song of Native Land*, VŠUP Prague, 1965
- Comte de Lautréamont, *Songs of Maldoror*, VŠUP Prague, 1965
- Georg Trakl, *Sebastian Dreaming*, VŠUP Prague, 1966
- F.M. Dostoevsky, *The devils*, VŠUP Prague, 1967
- *Memento Mori*, VŠUP Prague, 1968
- *Daleko od Moskvy*, Hořenice-Melbourne, 1968-2008
- Jakub de Waldt, *Exorcism of seven devils*, VŠUP Prague, 1969
- *Novalis, Fragments*, VŠUP Prague, 1969
- *Prague Passion 1969, - In memoriam of Jan Palach*, VŠUP Prague, 1969
- *Beyond words*, Prague-Rome-Paris-Beaune-Canberra, 1970-80
- *Myriapodes I*, Prague-Rome-Paris-Beaune-Canberra, 1970-99
- *Sky Cradle*, Hořenice-Canberra, 1972-80
- *Bobuslav Reynek, Odlet vlaštovek*, Melbourne, 1975-2005
- *Myriapodes II*, Beaune, 1977
- *Noémie*, Beaune, 1997
- *Novalis, Fragments et Grains de Pollen*, Labyrinth Press, 1980
- Jan Zahradníček, *Steps of Summer*, Melbourne, 1980
- Charles Baudelaire, *La Charogne*, Canberra, 1981

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<sup>645</sup> This information was collated from Australian Galleries' curriculum vitae of Herel, as well as correspondence with the artist.

"Petr Herel" (Australian Galleries, 2016),

[https://australiangalleries.com.au/app/uploads/2016/01/HEREL\\_CV16.pdf](https://australiangalleries.com.au/app/uploads/2016/01/HEREL_CV16.pdf).

Petr Herel to Ella Morrison. May 20, 2015.

Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, February 2, 2018.

- Vladimír Holan, *Nokturnál*, Canberra, 1981
- *Borges Sequel*, Rudy Komon' Sydney, 1982
- *Moon-steamer*, Canberra, 1982
- *Moon-bow*, Canberra, 1982
- Bohuslav Reynek, *Fenêtres sur le soir*, Labyrinth Press, 1982-1997
- Henri Michaux, *Poèmes*, Paris-Canberra, 1984-88
- Jean-Baptiste Lysland, *Poème trouvé au bord du Tibre*, Losne-Melbourne, 1984-2007
- Christian Gabrielle Guez Ricord, *La Mort a ses images*, Losne-Melbourne, 1985-2003
- Charles Nodier, *Fever and other stories*, Losne-Canberra, 1986
- *Aristotles, Recherche et Définition du Lieu*, Labyrinth Press, 1986
- *John Donne: Hymne to God, My God in my Sickness*, Labyrinth Press, 1986
- Guillaume Apollinaire, *Alcools*, Losne-Canberra, 1986-2000
- Gérard de Nerval, *Deux lettres inédites à Ferdinand Sartorius*, Losne-Canberra, 1987-88
- Pascal Commère, *Fenêtres la nuit vient*, Folle Avoine, 1987
- René Daumal, *Phantom skin*, Labyrinth Press, 1987
- Jan M. Tomeš, *Slova, Barvy, Tvary, Hudba, Ticho*, Labyrinth Press, 1988
- Arthur Rimbaud, *Voyelles, Dylan Thomas, Twenty four years*, GIW, Canberra, 1988
- Giorgos Seferis, *On the ray of winter sun*, Labyrinth Press, 1988
- Guillaume Apollinaire, *Zone*, Labyrinth Press, 1988
- Pascal Commère, *Un poème parfois son ombre*, Labyrinth Press, 1988
- *Colours of saying*, Canberra, 1988
- *Metonymy*, Canberra, 1988
- Victor Segalen, *Trois lettres inédites*, Losne-Melbourne, 1988-2003
- Vladimir Nabokov, *Trois courts poèmes*, Losne-Melbourne, 1988-2004
- J.B. Lysland, *Quatre poèmes*, Labyrinth Press, 1989

- Pavel Žádný, *Sněh/La neige*, Labyrinth Press, 1989
- Pascal Commère, *Talus*, Labyrinth Press, 1989
- Gaston Puel, *Croissance, suivi de Ratures*, Labyrinth Press, 1989
- Thierry Bouchard, *Rosedale*, Labyrinth Press, 1989
- Rainer Maria Rilke, *Notebook of Malte Brigge*, Canberra, 1990
- Ruth Cowen, *Real estates of the Heart*; Graphic Investigation Workshop (GIW), Canberra, 1992
- Henry Chopin, *The rich hours*, Monash Studio Series, Melbourne, 1992
- *Traversare I*, Monash Studio Series, Melbourne, 1992
- Charles Nodier, *Apothéoses et Inprécations de Pythagore*, Uncollected Works Series, Losne-Melbourne, 1992-2010
- Gérard de Nerval, *Fragments d'une première version d'Aurelia*, Labyrinth Press, 1994
- Saint-Pol-Roux, *Silence*, GIW, Canberra, 1994
- Rainer Maria Rilke, *Last entry*, GIW, Canberra, 1994
- Vladimír Holan, *Orpheus*, GIW, Canberra, 1994-2004
- Pierre Chappuis, *Sur le pont Charles*, Labyrinth Press, 1995
- J.B. Lysland, *Prologue d'un livre brûlé*, Labyrinth Press, 1995
- J.M. Tomeš, *Verše; Spolek českých bibliofilů*, Prague, 1995
- Josef Hora and J.M. Tomeš, *Helouan*, Canberra, 1996
- Dimitris Tsaloumàs, *Promise*, Labyrinth Press, 1997
- *The epitaph of Marcel Duchamp*, Canberra, 1997
- Michel Falempin, *Le Crépuscle du Matin*, L'Ordalie, 1997
- Vladimír Holan, *Sbohem*, GIW, Canberra, 1998
- *Twelve Laments and One*, Christchurch, 1999
- Jorge Luis Borges, *I, I am, A blind man*, Finlay Press, Goulburn, 1999
- *Annales, Le complot de Famine*, Canberra-Melbourne, 1999-2009
- Pierre Albert-Birot, *Poèmes Quotidiens*, Canberra, 2000

- Jan M. Tomeš, *Stesk*, Canberra, 2000
- Klement Bochořák, *Tři básně*, Canberra, 2000
- François Lallier, *Tissu du temps*, Canberra, 2000
- Daniel Leuwers, *Regard Métis*, Canberra, 2001
- Jiří Kolář, *Tupci/The Dullards/Au milieu des Abroutis*, Labyrinth Press, 2002
- Charles Baudelaire, *The Journey*, Labyrinth Press, 2002
- Michael Reed and Petr Herel, *Man disappears*, Christchurch-Canberra, 2002
- Federico Garcia Lorca, *Vision*, Canberra, 2003
- Alex Selenitsch/ Petr Herel, *How Angels appear to us*, Melbourne, 2004
- *CMAG Cancellation Series*, Melbourne, 2004
- Dimitris Tsaloumàs, *The message*, Melbourne, 2005
- Pavel Komanec, *Poslední Stránky*, Melbourne, 2005
- Georges-Emmanuel Clancier, *Grand frère*, Bussy-le-Grand, m.m. éd., 2006
- Pascal Commère, *De tous les animaux je serai l'an*, Marigny-Melbourne, 2006
- Gaston Puel, *Sous le Chêne*, Losne-Melbourne, 2006-2008
- Jean Tardieu, *The Truth about Monsters*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2007
- Thierry Bouchard, *Livre des Fuites*, Labyrinth Press, Melbourne 2007
- Aloysius Bertrand, *The Night and its Wonders*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2008
- Jules Supervielle, *Longing for the Earth*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2008
- Gaston Puel, *Le pur esprit*, Edition Rivière, 2009
- *Séquelle. Jean Tardieu, La Vérité sur les Monstres*, Librairie Nicaise, Paris, 2009
- Jean-Baptiste Lysland, *Čtyři básně z podletí zapomnění*, Bonaventura, Prague, 2009
- Jan M. Tomeš, *Z pozdních veršů*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2009
- Pascal Commère, *A, Z. a, z.*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2009
- Pierre Albert -Biro, *Poems and Days*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2010

- Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Nine Doors to your Body*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2011
- Saint-Pol-Roux, *Mlčeni*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2011
- Remi Pharo, *L'Irréveillée*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2011
- Dimitris Tsaloumas, *The Distant Present: Three Poems from the Book of Epigrams*, Australian Galleries & Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2011
- Antjie Krog, *Sisteme, Systèmes, Systems*, m.m. éd., Bussy-le-Grand, 2011
- *Bibliographie des Livres imprimés par Thierry Bouchard*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2012
- Wang Wei, *V oboře*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2012
- *Seeds of a Poem*, Plantin Institut, Antwerp, 2012
- Des Cowley, *Involution (Excerpts)*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2012
- Gerald Murnane, *Excerpts from Inland*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2013
- Dimitris Tsaloumas, *The Barge (Bárka)*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2013
- *Labyrinth Press Bibliography*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2013
- Christopher Brennan, *Delicate interactions / Christopher Brennan, Stéphane Mallarmé*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2013
- *Beaune Etchings 1977*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2014
- *Four Pages from a Register of Souls*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2014
- Peter Lyssiotis, Petr Herel, *The Elder Paints an Icon*, Uncollected Works Press & Masterthief, Melbourne, 2014
- Edmond Teste, *Electro – Encephalo – Grams & Petr Herel, Intaglio Images*, Uncollected Works Press, Edmond Teste Series, Melbourne, 2014
- Jean Tardieu, *Mister interrogates Sir*, Uncollected Works Press, Edmond Teste Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *2014 Edmond Teste Series*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2014
- *Book of Five Unidentified Specimens*, Uncollected Works Press, Edmond Teste Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *Symmetry Reflections*, Uncollected Works Press, Edmond Teste Series, Melbourne, 2014

- *Asymmetry Thoughts*, Uncollected Works Press, Edmond Teste Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *New Anatomy of Angels: Constellations & Colours in Heaven*, Uncollected Works Press, Edmond Teste Series, Melbourne, 2015
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- Alex Selenitsch, *Seven Poems from Near and Far*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2015

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- *Kůra Času*, Hořenice, 1969
- *Masky*, Hořenice, 1969
- *Novalis Sequel*, Hořenice-Canberra, 1969-1996
- R.M. Rilke, *Duino Elegies I, II and III*, Hořenice, 1970
- Richard Billinger, *In Hora Mortis*, Hořenice, 1970
- Tetovaná Bída, *I, II, and III*, Hořenice-Melbourne, 1970-1973
- *Odkryvání kamene*, Hořenice-Melbourne, 1970-1975
- *Pozpátku*, Prague-Melbourne, 1970-2005
- Maître Eckhart, *Livre vert des Instructions spirituelles (Excerpts)*, Uncollected Works Series, Hořenice-Melbourne, 1970-2005
- *Samá noba – samá hlava*, Hořenice-Melbourne, 1970-2006
- *Ruka Rukavice*, Hořenice, 1972
- *Six Galileo Galilei Men*, Galileo Galilei Ship, 1973
- *Tetovaná bída IV*, Melbourne, 1973-1974
- *Tetovaná bída V*, Melbourne-Canberra, 1974-1985
- *Château de Millery Book*, Autun, 1976
- *Noémie*, Beaune, 1977

- Pierre Albert-Birot, *Jedenatřicet kapesních básní*, Beaune, 1977
- *Herbarium Vivomortum*, Beaune, 1977
- *Poet and Death*, Beaune – Melbourne, 1977-2003
- *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Semily, 1978
- *Vivomortum*, Semily, 1978
- *Vivomurata*, Semily, 1978
- *Carnet d'un malade*, Semily, 1978
- Christian Morgenstern, *The Moonsheep*, Canberra, 1979
- *Spojité nádoby/ Communicating Vessels*, Canberra-Melbourne, 1980-2005
- *Stigmata*, Canberra, 1982
- Arthur Rimbaud, *Delirium II*, Canberra, 1983
- *Mimes*, Canberra, 1983
- Auguste Rodin, *Last Testament*, Canberra, 1983-1995
- Antonin Artaud, *Fragments of a Journal in Hell*, Canberra, 1984
- *I'll be your mirror*, Canberra-Melbourne, 1987-2004
- *A soi-même / To oneself*, Canberra, 1988-1999
- *Four Secret instructions of a Book*, Canberra, 1995
- Jean Paul (Richter), *Forty four days of dog post*, Canberra, 1996
- Hölderlin, *Hyperion (Excerpts)*, Canberra, 1997
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- *Book of Entrances*, Christchurch, 1999
- Richard Billinger, *In Hora Mortis*, Canberra, 1999-2001
- Daniel Leuwers, *Erratum*, Melbourne, 2003
- Giacomo Leopardi, *A Sign*, Melbourne, 2003
- Jan Skácel, *A znovu láska*, Prague-Melbourne, 2003
- Tristan Tzara, *Flamme seule*, Melbourne, 2003

- *Four Days, Four Nights*, Melbourne, 2003
- Jan M. Tomeš, *Verše?*, Prague-Melbourne, 2003
- Daniel Leuwers, *Yeux verts*, Tours-Melbourne, 2003
- Daniel Leuwers, *Fenêtre défenestrée*, Tours-Melbourne, 2003
- *Saint Days/ Svaté dny*, Melbourne, 2003-2005
- Vladimír Holan, *Zda jedenkrát/ Will you, O Lord*, Melbourne, 2004
- Gotfried Benn, *Ein Wort/ A Word*, Melbourne, 2004
- *Dreams*, Melbourne, 2004
- *Testa-Ments*, Melbourne, 2004
- Anna Akhmatova, *Two Poems*, Melbourne, 2005
- *Game of Diamonds*, Melbourne, 2005
- Daniel Leuwers / Petr Herel, *Les Aumônes*, Tours-Melbourne, 2005
- Jean Tardieu, *New Quiz Game for Oedipus*, Melbourne, 2005
- *Pour féliciter les années à venir*, Melbourne, 2005
- *The Alms*, Melbourne, 2005
- *Melancholy Waste*, Melbourne, 2005
- *Either/ Or*, Melbourne, 2006
- Daniel Leuwers, *Une Sonnete Angélique*, Tours-Melbourne, 2006
- *Cinquantaine des rois immortels*, Melbourne, 2006
- Daniel Leuwers, *Tirrer de toi le poème*, Tours-Melbourne, 2007
- Rainer Maria Rilke, *Blank Spots Reserved for the Divine*, Melbourne, 2007
- Daniel Leuwers, *Ciselés, Déchirés*, Tours-Melbourne, 2007
- Alain Jouffroy, *Le peintre qui pourrait accompagner ces petits textes n'existe toujours pas*, Melbourne, 2007
- *Eleven Dreams of a Tree*, Melbourne, 2007
- *Cancercancra*, Melbourne, 2008



- *Cinq Châteaux en Espagne*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2008
- Henry Bouchard / Petr Herel, *Tu as oublié*, Losne-Melbourne, 2008
- *Secret Places*, Melbourne, 2008
- *Simpson Stars*, Melbourne, 2008
- *Médaille pour Paul Celan*, Tours-Melbourne, 2009
- Vladimír Holan, *Testamenty*, Melbourne, 2009
- *L'Enclave*, Tours-Melbourne, 2009
- *Van Gogh dance*, Tours-Melbourne, 2009
- Pierre de Ronsard, *I will be under ground...*, Tours-Melbourne, 2009
- Siham Bouhlal, *Le Fil de feu*, Tours-Melbourne, 2009
- Emily Dickinson, *Drab Habitation*, Melbourne, 2010
- *Everlevel*, Melbourne, 2010
- *Mirrored sounds*, Melbourne, 2010
- Barr Al-Sayyab, *My new room*, Melbourne, 2010
- Tony Woods, *On the way*, Melbourne, 2010
- *Hommage to Emma Hauck*, Melbourne, 2011
- *Vite*, Melbourne-Tours, 2011
- *Urban Gridded Notebook*, Melbourne, 2011
- Gabriel Marcel, *Remember...*, Melbourne, 2012
- Adriena Šimotová, *Loučení s tělem / Adieu au corps*, Melbourne, 2012
- Pascal Commère, *Gramens*, Melbourne-Marigny, 2012
- Daniel Leuwers, *Les langues*, Tours-Melbourne, 2012
- *Dream Quarry*, Melbourne, 2013
- Thierry Bouchard, *Une Poème...*, Melbourne, 2013
- Dimitris Tsaloumas, *A Paper Boat*, Melbourne, 2013

- Daniel Leuwers, *Sous la lame*, Melbourne-Tours, 2013
- *To Antonin Artaud, Nerve seales 1., 2., 3.*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2013
- *Six Burned Books of Antonin Artaud*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2013
- *L'Irréveillée, pour la première fois...*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2013
- *Monkey Magic*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2013
- Daniel Leuwers, *Huit portes*, Tours-Melbourne, 2013
- *Monsieur Teste's livre pauvre*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2014
- *Monsieur Teste's Book No 1*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2014
- *Monsieur Teste's Livre Pauvre: nine angels*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *Livre Pauvre de Mounsieur Teste: sans titre*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *The Secret Book of Monsieur Teste*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *Monsieur Teste's Book of Flags*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *Monsieur Teste's Book of Snakes and Ladders*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *Monsieur Teste's Book of of Skulls*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2014
- *Book of untitles spaces for Monsieur Teste*, Uncollected Works Press, Melbourne, 2014
- *Proposed book No 1*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *Proposed book No 2*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *Proposed book No 3*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- *Proposed book No 4*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014
- Frederich Hölderlin, *Die Heimat/ Home*, Uncollected Works Series, Melbourne, 2014

## Appendix 2

*Collections including Herel's work*<sup>646</sup>

### Australia

- Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney
- Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
- Bailleu Library, University of Melbourne, Melbourne
- Canberra Museum and Gallery, Canberra
- Caulfield Art Centre, Melbourne
- Deakin University Art Collection, Geelong
- Geelong Art Gallery, Geelong
- Graphic Investigation Workshop Archive, Australian National University Library, Canberra
- Hamilton Art Gallery, Hamilton
- Holmes à Court Art Collection, Perth
- James Hardie Library of Australian Art, Brisbane
- Mornington Peninsula Arts Centre, Mornington
- National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
- National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- National Library of Australia, Canberra
- Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston
- Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
- State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
- Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

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<sup>646</sup> This information was collated from Australian Galleries' curriculum vitae of Herel, as well as correspondence with the artist.

"Petr Herel" (Australian Galleries, 2016),

[https://australiangalleries.com.au/app/uploads/2016/01/HEREL\\_CV16.pdf](https://australiangalleries.com.au/app/uploads/2016/01/HEREL_CV16.pdf).

Petr Herel to Ella Morrison. May 20, 2015.

Petr Herel to Ella Morrison, February 2, 2018.

- Warrnambool Art Gallery, Warrnambool

## Europe

- Albertina Museum, Vienna, Austria
- *Arsenal Bibliothèque*, Paris, France
- *Association Française d'Amateurs d'Estampes*, Paris, France
- *Beaune Bibliothèque*, Beaune, France
- *Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire*, Unithèque, Lausanne, Switzerland
- *Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris, France
- *Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet*, Paris, France
- British Museum, London, United Kingdom
- City of Prague Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic
- *Dijon Bibliothèque*, Dijon, France
- *Forney Bibliothèque*, Paris, France
- *Il Segno Collection*, Rome, Italy
- *L'Arco Studio International d'Arte Graphica*, Rome, Italy
- *Le Locle Art Museum*, Switzerland
- *Médiathèque Toussaint*, Anger, France
- *Mulhouse Bibliothèque*, Mulhouse, France
- Museum of Modern Art, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia
- Museum of Contemporary Graphic Art, Friederikstadt, Norway
- Museum of Czech Literature, Prague, Czech Republic
- Museum of Czech and Slovak Exile of 20th Century, Brno, Czech Republic
- National Gallery of Czech Art, Czech Republic
- Netherlands Royal Library, Hague, Netherlands
- *Plantin Institut*, Antwerp, Belgium

- *Prieuré de Saint-Cosme*, France
- *Stiftung*, Schloss Haldenstein, Switzerland

United States of America

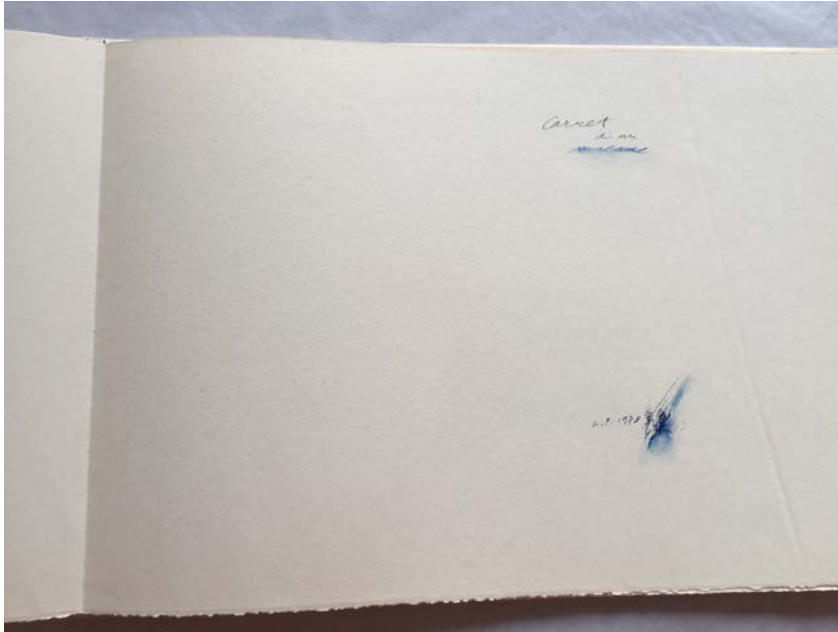
- Stanford University Library, Stanford, United States of America

## Introduction

### Figure 1

Petr Herel, *Carnet d'un Malade*, 1978, one of two unique impressions, artist's collection, Melbourne.

a)

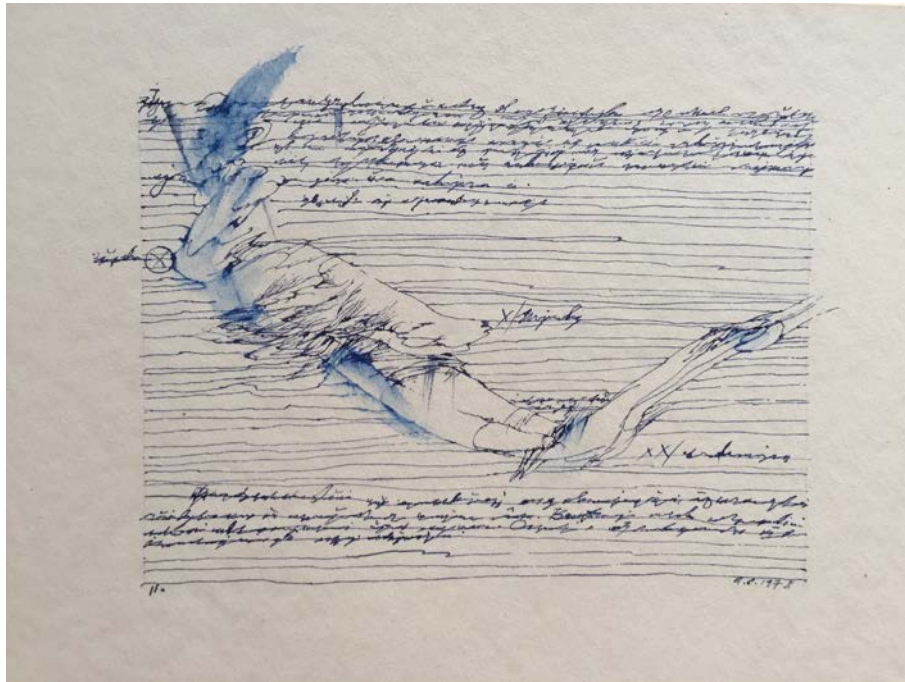


b)



<sup>647</sup> The inclusion of all images of Herel's work is approved by the artist. All other images are individually credited. All efforts have been made to obtain permissions.

c)



d)



## Chapter One

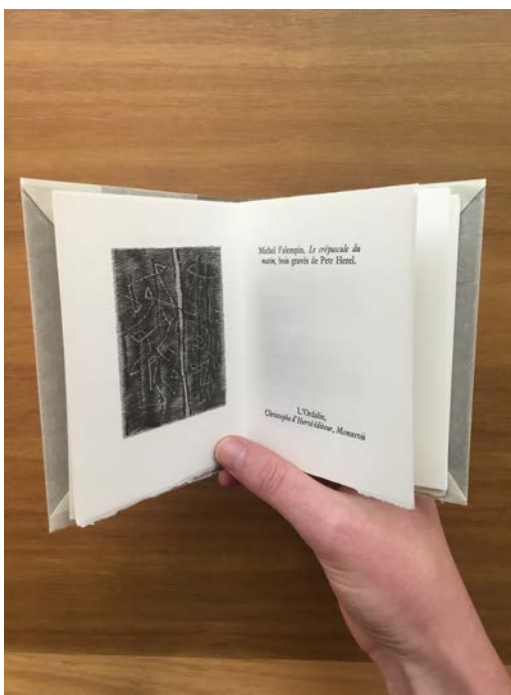
### Figure 1

Petr Herel, Michel Falempin (writer), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Le Crépuscule du Matin* (Lyon: L'Ordalie, Christophe D'Hervé éditeur, 1997), 96/130, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)

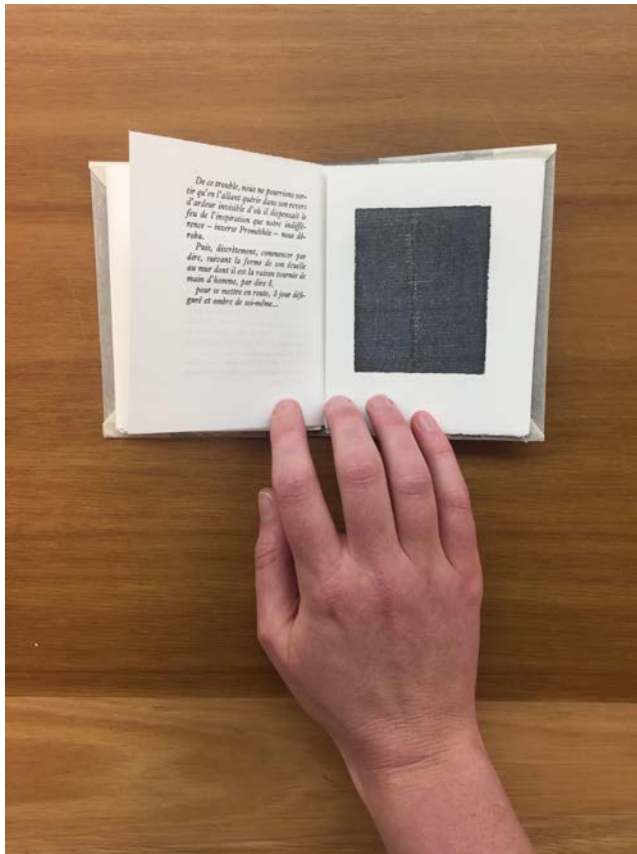


b)





c)



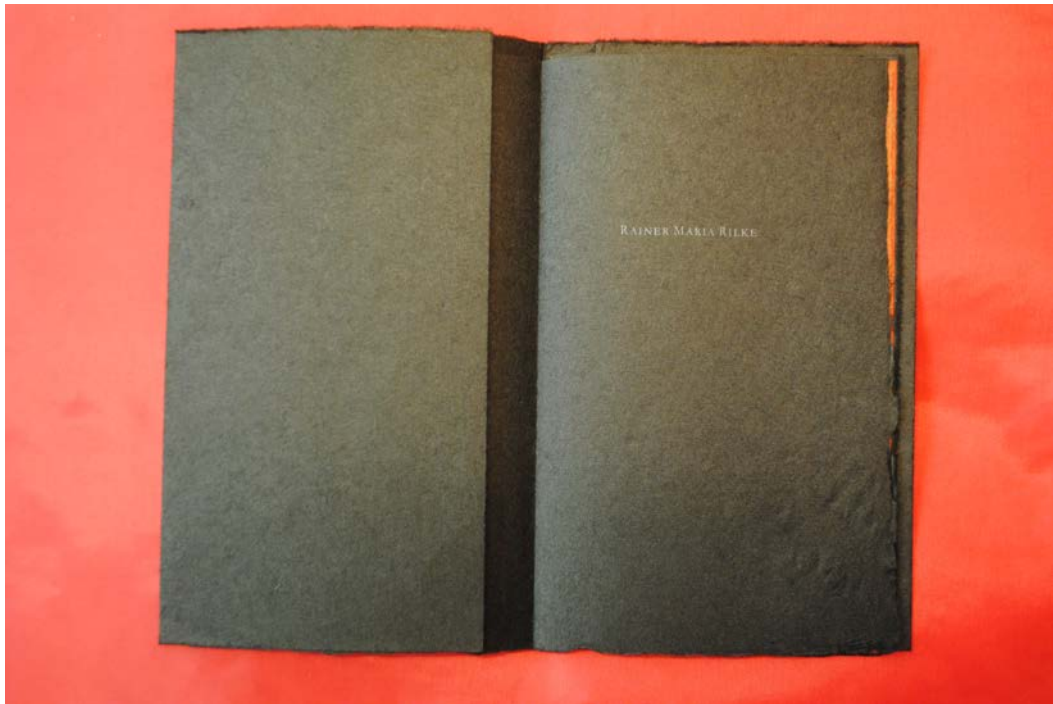
**Figure 2**

Petr Herel, Rainer Maria Rilke (writer), *Letzte Eintragung = Last Entry* (Canberra: Canberra School of Art, Artists' Book Studio, 1994), 8/12, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



b)



c)



d)



e)





**Figure 3**

Leslie Hewitt, *Riffs on Real Time (10 of 10)*, 2006-2009, chromogenic print, 76.2 x 61.0 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Courtesy of the Guggenheim Museum.



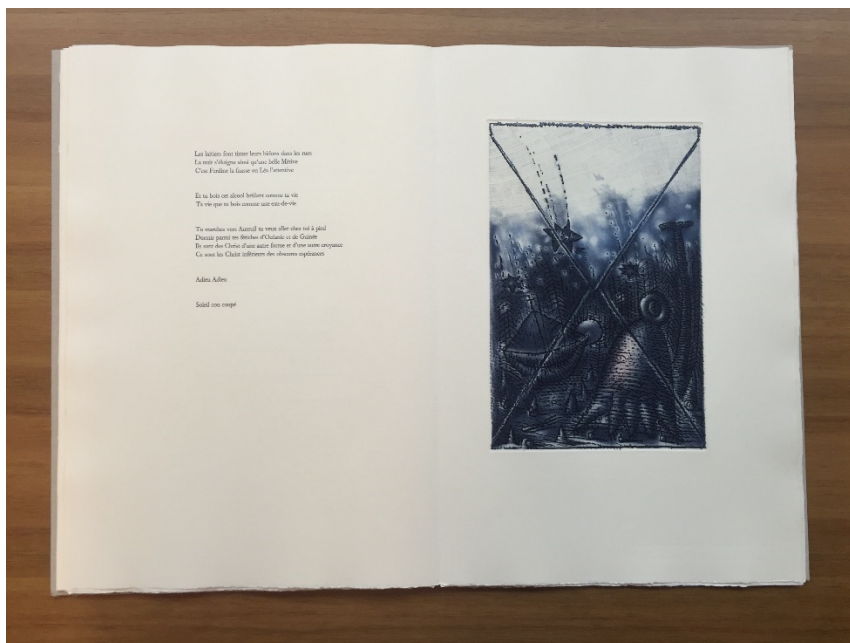
**Figure 4**

Petr Herel, Guillaume Apollinaire (writer), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Zone* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 24/27, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



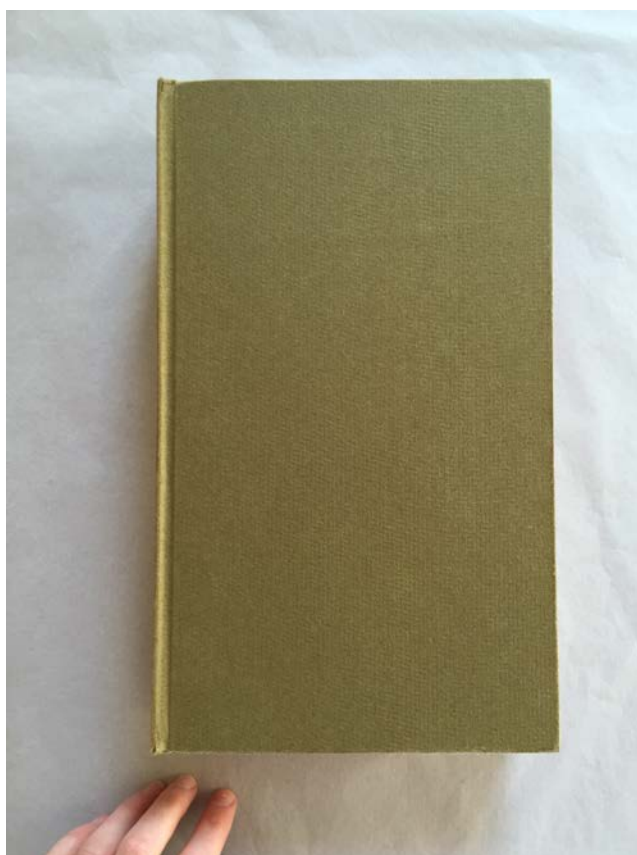
b)



**Figure 5**

Petr Herel, *Zánebí Slov* (Beaune, Canberra, Melbourne, Paris, Prague, Rome, 1970-1980),  
 unique copy, artist's collection, Melbourne.

a)



b)

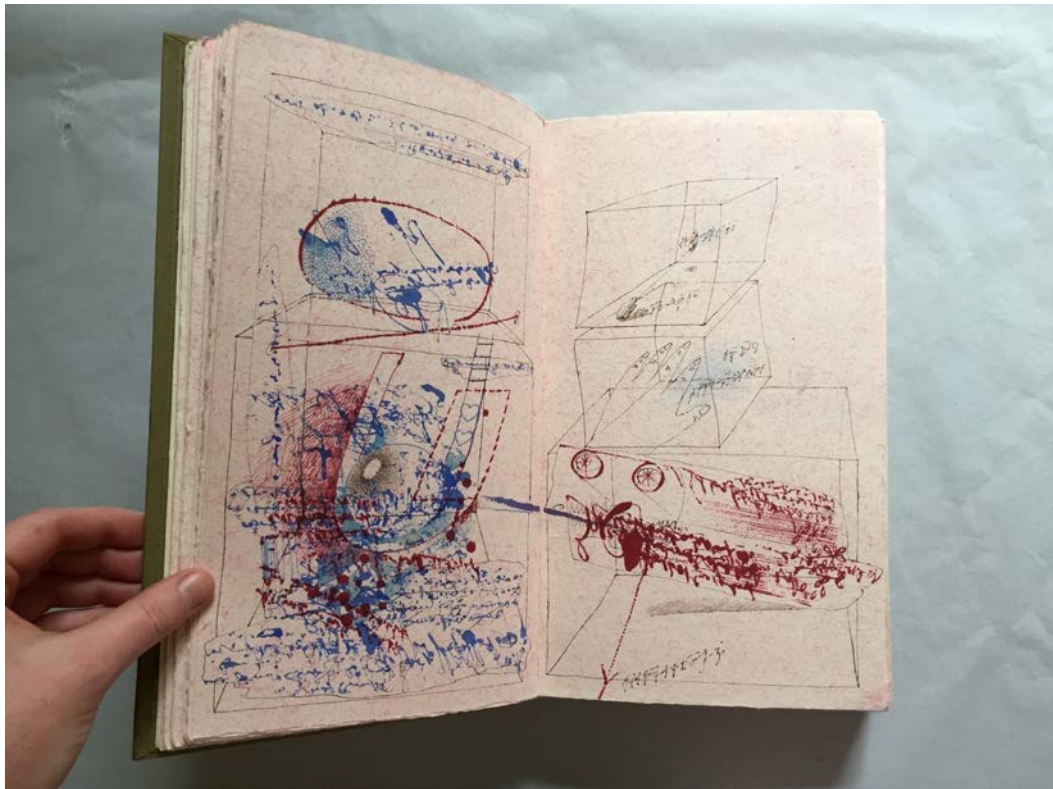


c)

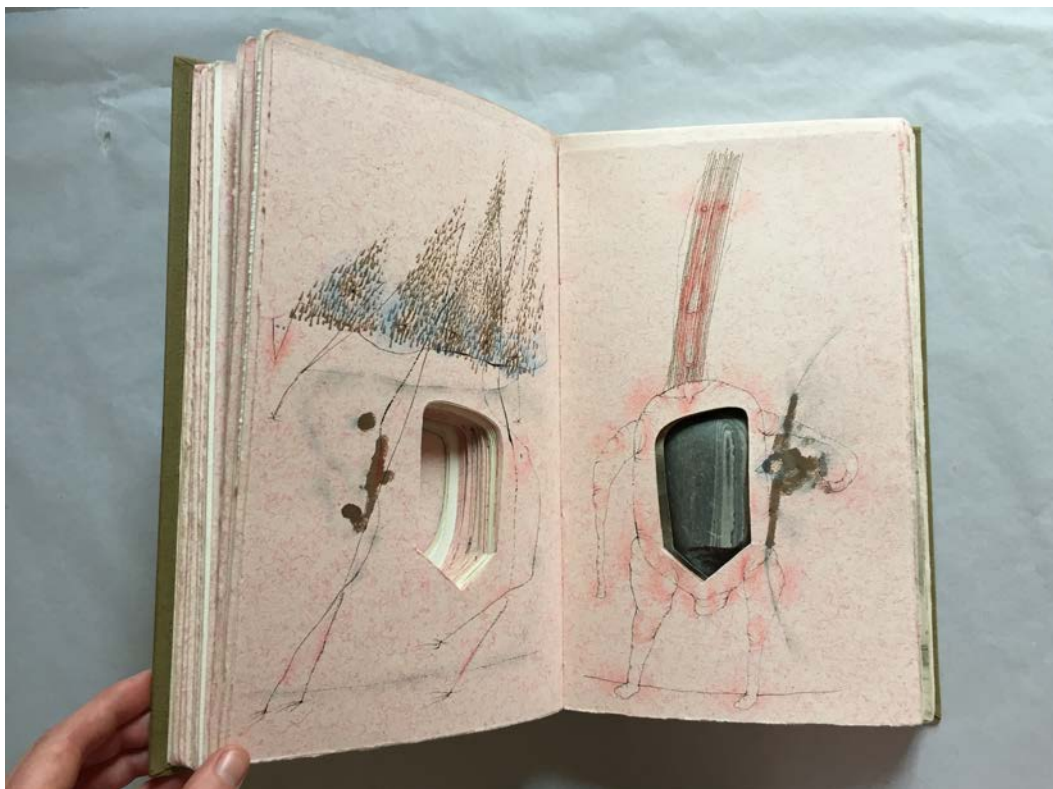




d)



e)



**Figure 6**

Petr Herel, Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Rosedale* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1989), 12/13, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



b)

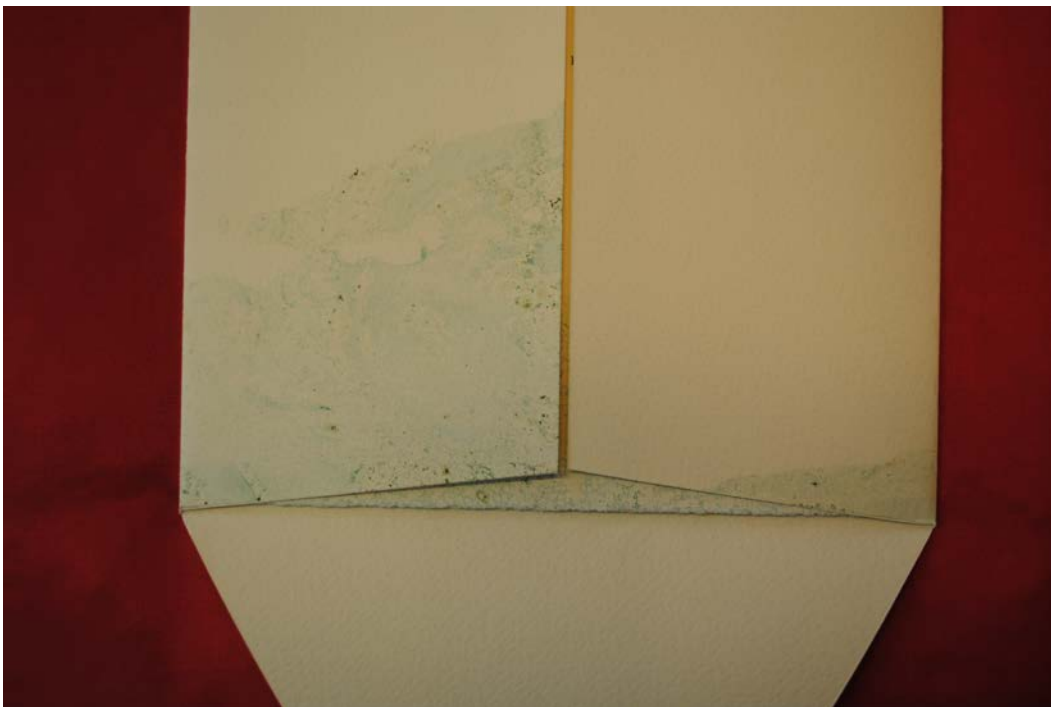




c)



d)



e)



**Figure 7**

Matthais Grunewald, *The Isenheim Altarpiece*, c. 1515, oil painting on panel, 269.0 x 307.0 cm (centre panel), Unterlinden Museum, Colmar. <http://www.musee-unterlinden.com/en/collections-du-musee-unterlinden/the-isenheim-altarpiece/>



Petr Herel, Gérard de Nerval (writer), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Fragments d'une Première Version d'Aurélia* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1994), 16/49, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

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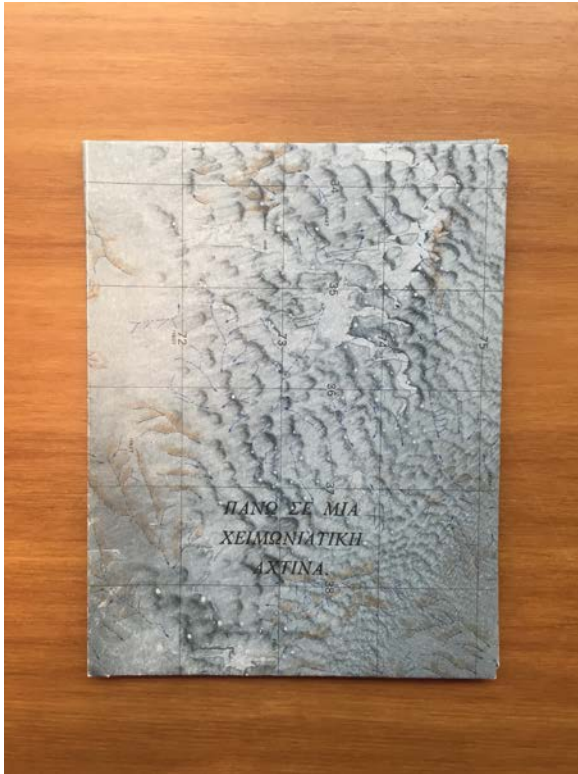
En arrivant les gens se mirent dans une chambre assez  
grosse. Deux hostes étoient suspendus au mur et au dessus  
de cette hostie étoit une cornue, qui me sembla  
avoir des restes de l'ancien.  
11 En passant la porte d'un côté étoit par le bord de la rue au chateau  
de Johannisberg. Je me disais mon oncle ~~qui m'entra~~  
à la table. Je sollicitais en attendant de la rage de la plume de  
l'île où il me vint. ~~Je me disais~~ ~~Je me disais~~ ~~Je me disais~~  
~~Je me disais~~ ~~Je me disais~~ ~~Je me disais~~ ~~Je me disais~~  
Je me disais. Je me disais pendant la nuit, que je me  
trouvais presque dans un atome qui traversait la terre. On  
sortait de l'autre côté du mur plume de la rue. Je me disais  
en un instant traversait au pied d'une rue. Je me disais  
Je me disais pour l'empêcher. Je sentais alors que je descendais  
vers la terre de la terre. Mon corps étoit en porte sans souffrir  
par un courant de l'air. Je me disais que je me transportais jusqu'en

## Chapter Two

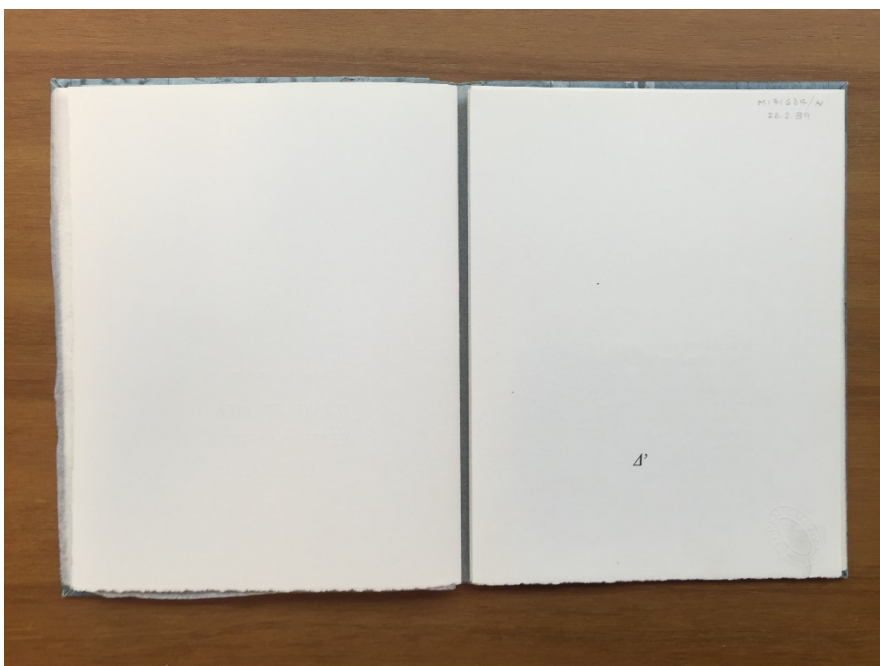
Figure 1

Petr Herel, George Seferis (writer), Dorothy Catherine Davis (translator), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Pano se Mia Cheimoniatike Achtina = On a Ray of Winter Sun* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 10/13, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)

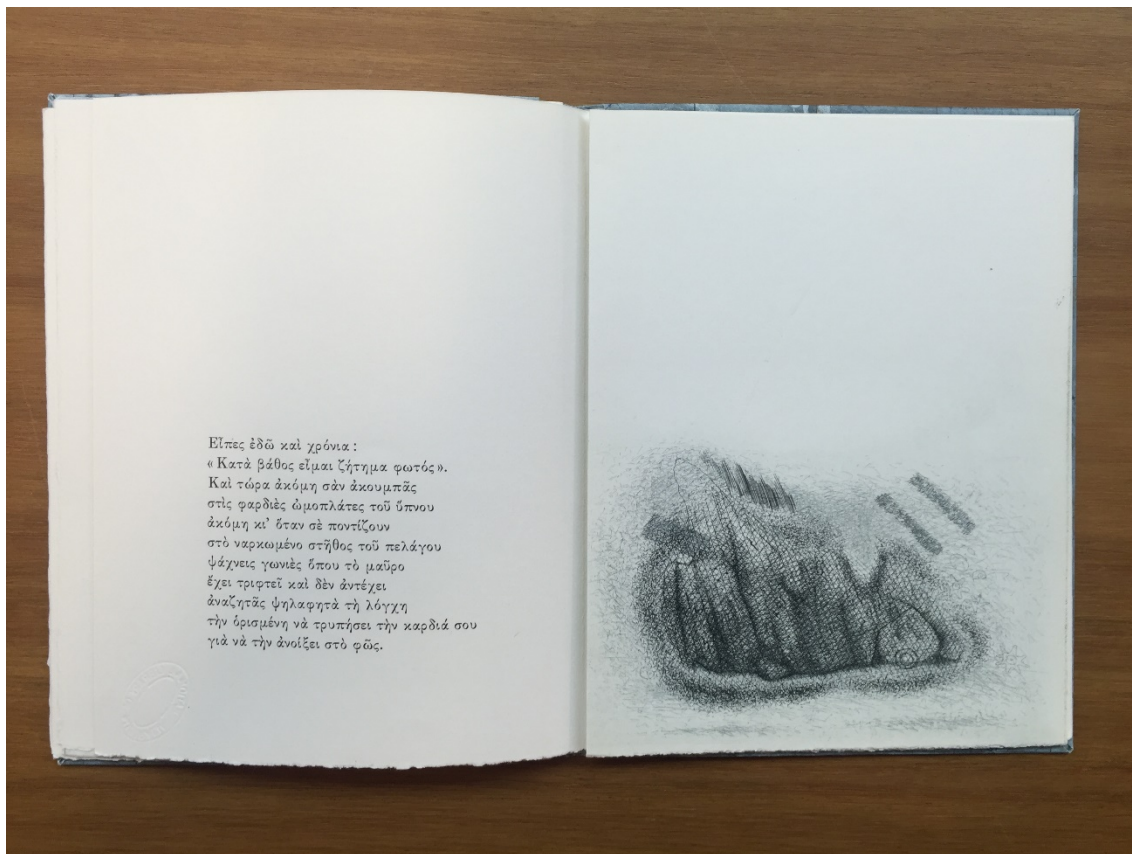


b)





c)



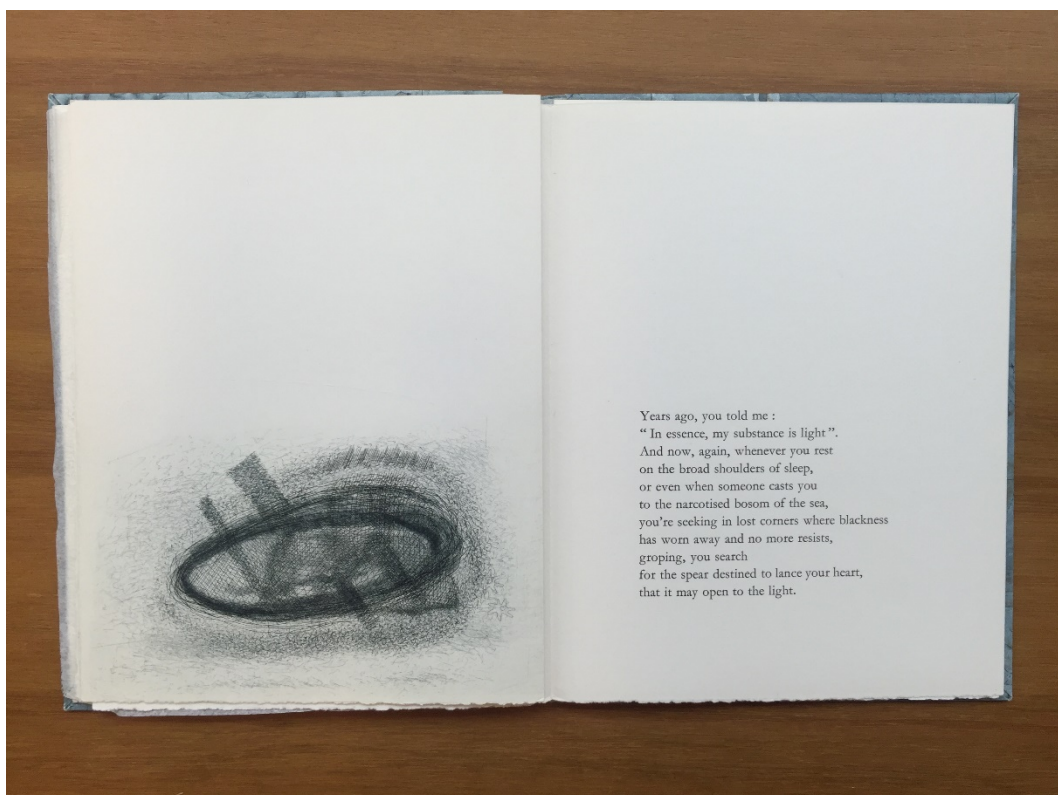
d)



e)

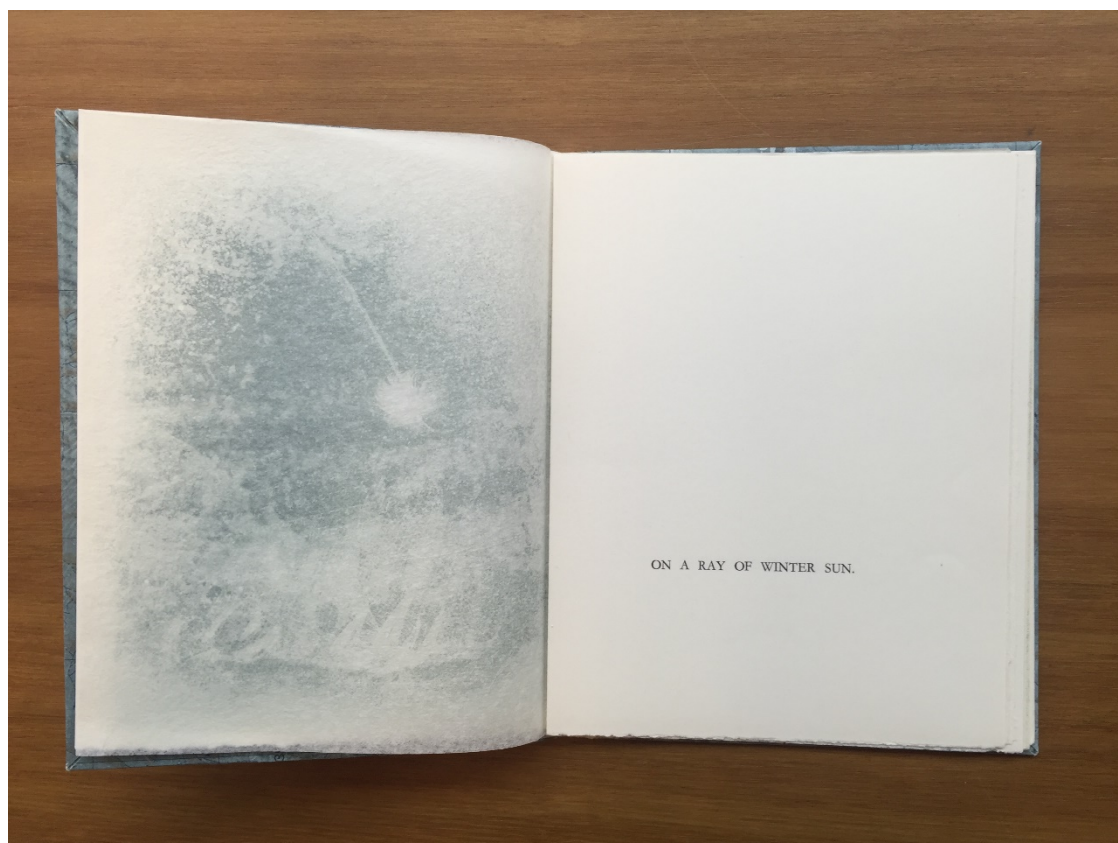


f)





g)



h)



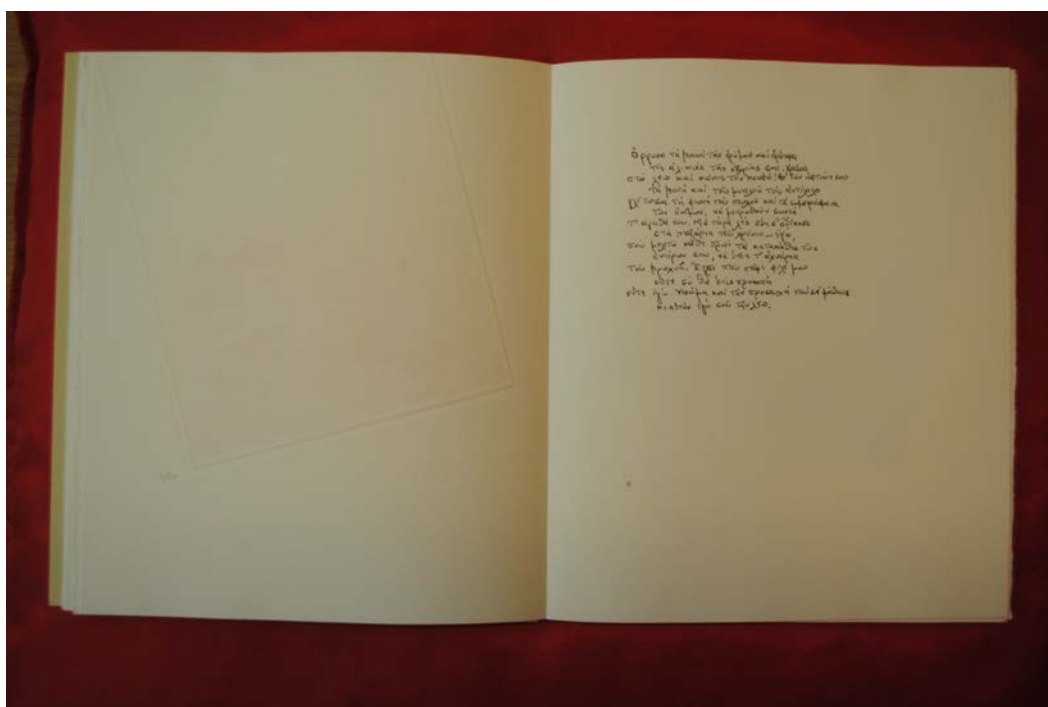
**Figure 2**

Petr Herel, Dimitris Tsaloumas (writer), Philip Grundy (translator), *The Distant Present: Three Poems from the Book of Epigrams* (Melbourne: Uncollected Works Press, 2011), 3/17, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



b)





c)



d)



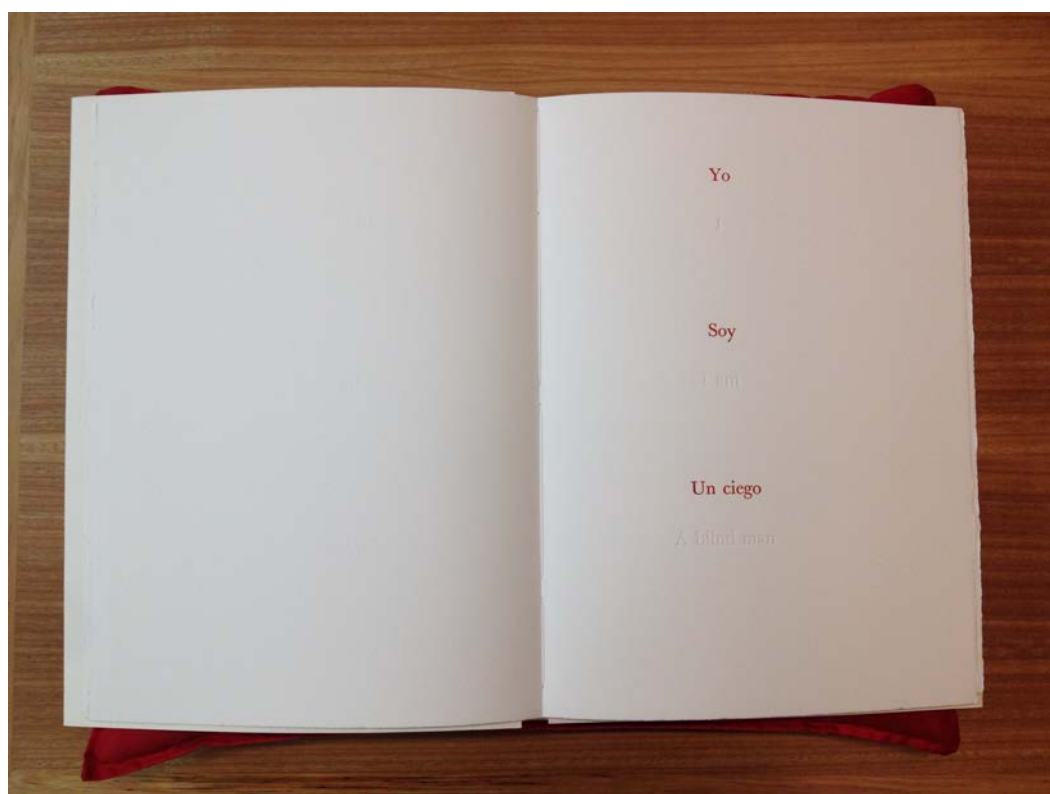
e)



**Figure 3**

Petr Herel, Jorge Luis Borges (writer), *I, I am a Blind Man: Three Poems* (Goulburn, N.S.W.: Finlay Press, Yabber Yabber Publications, 1999), 17/20, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

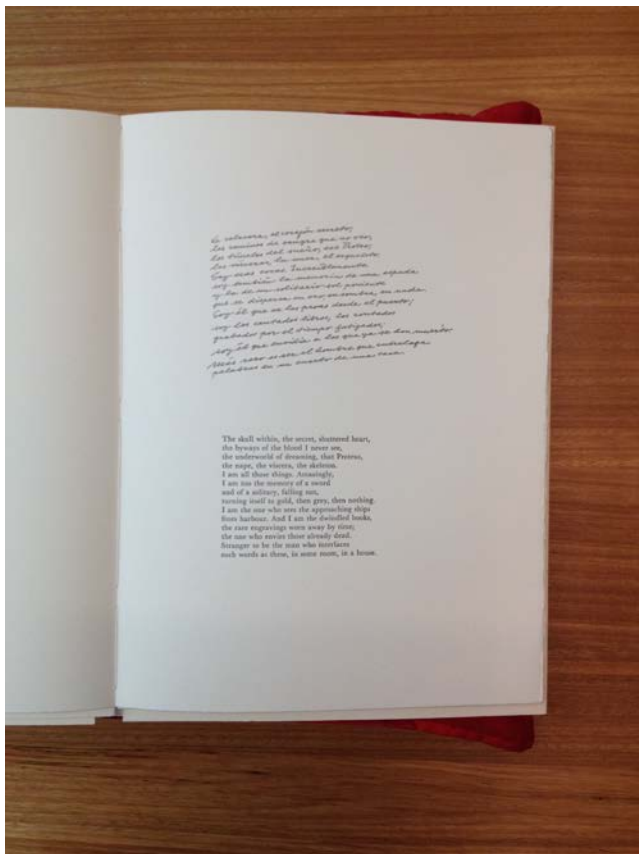
a)



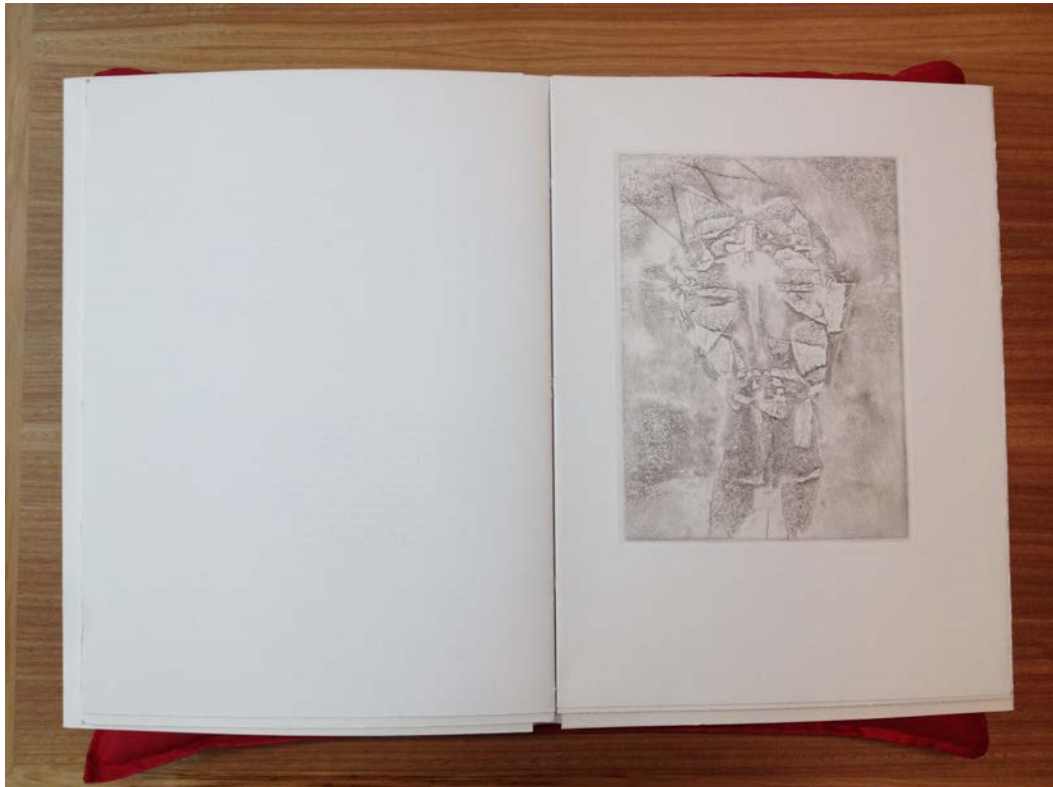
**b)**



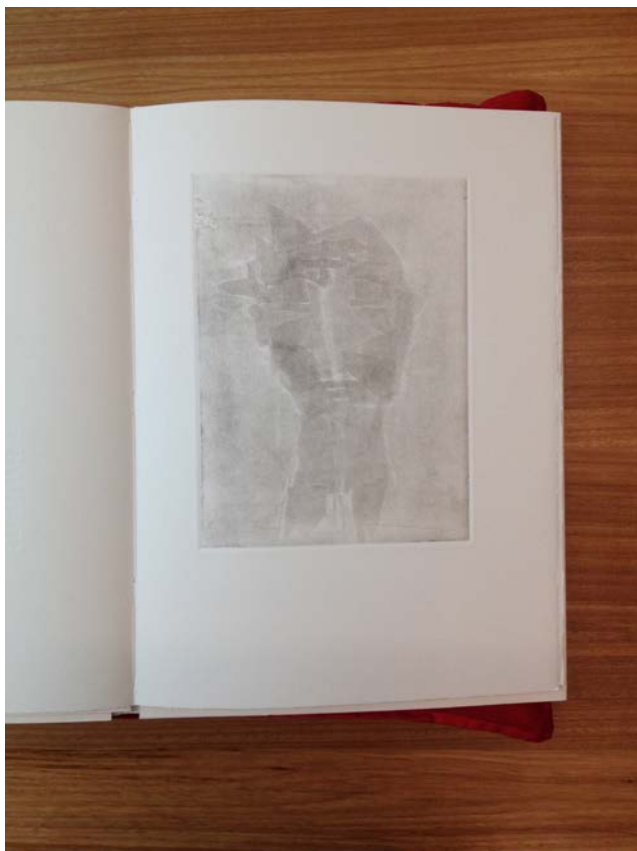
c)



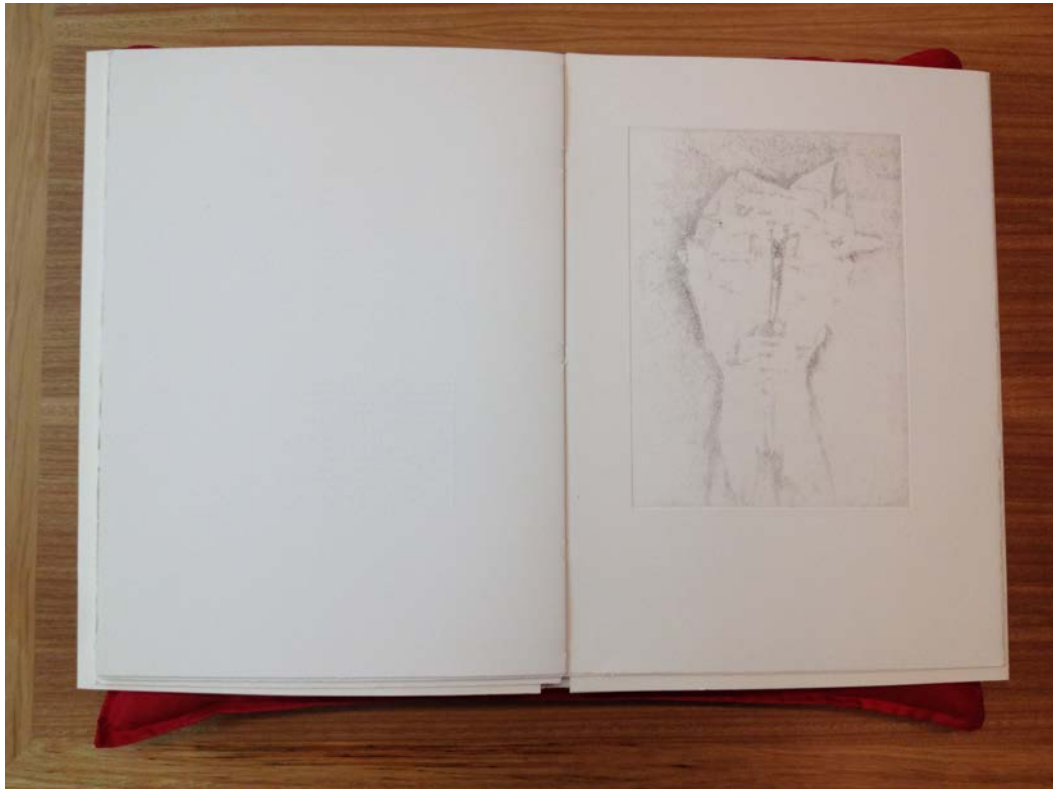
d)



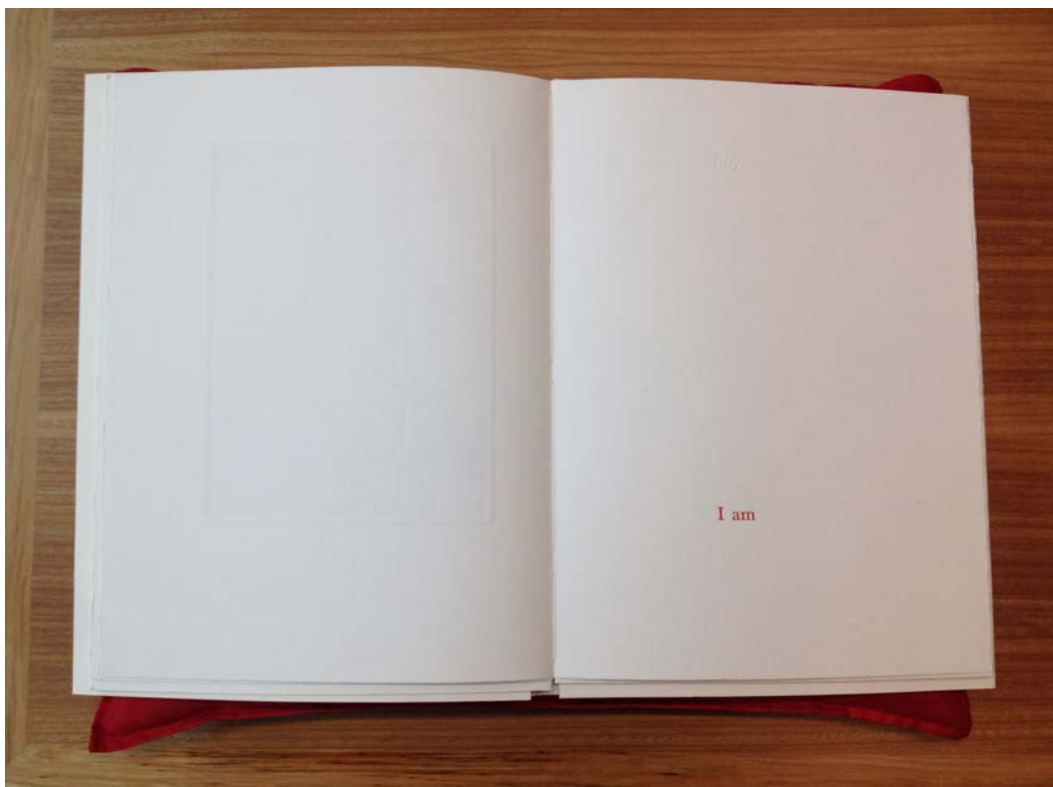
e)



f)



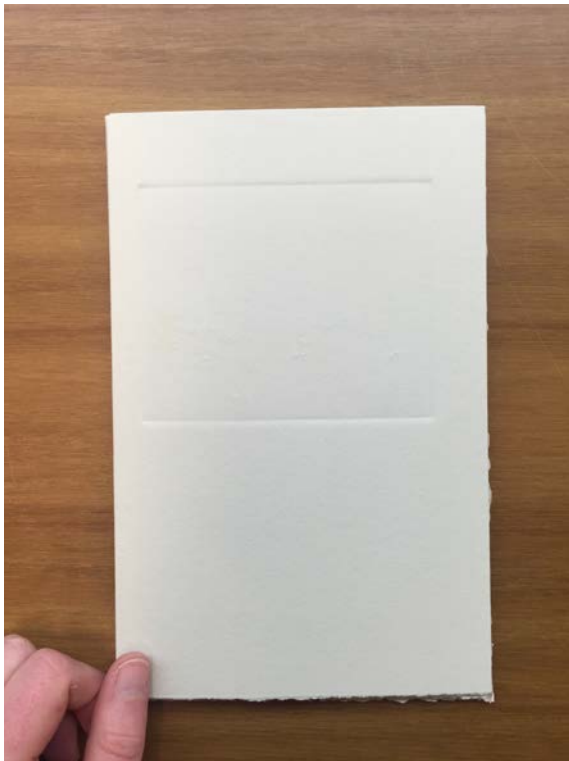
g)



**Figure 4**

Petr Herel, Gerald Murnane (writer), *Excerpts from Inland* (Melbourne: Uncollected Works Press, 2013), 10/10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

**a)**



**b)**

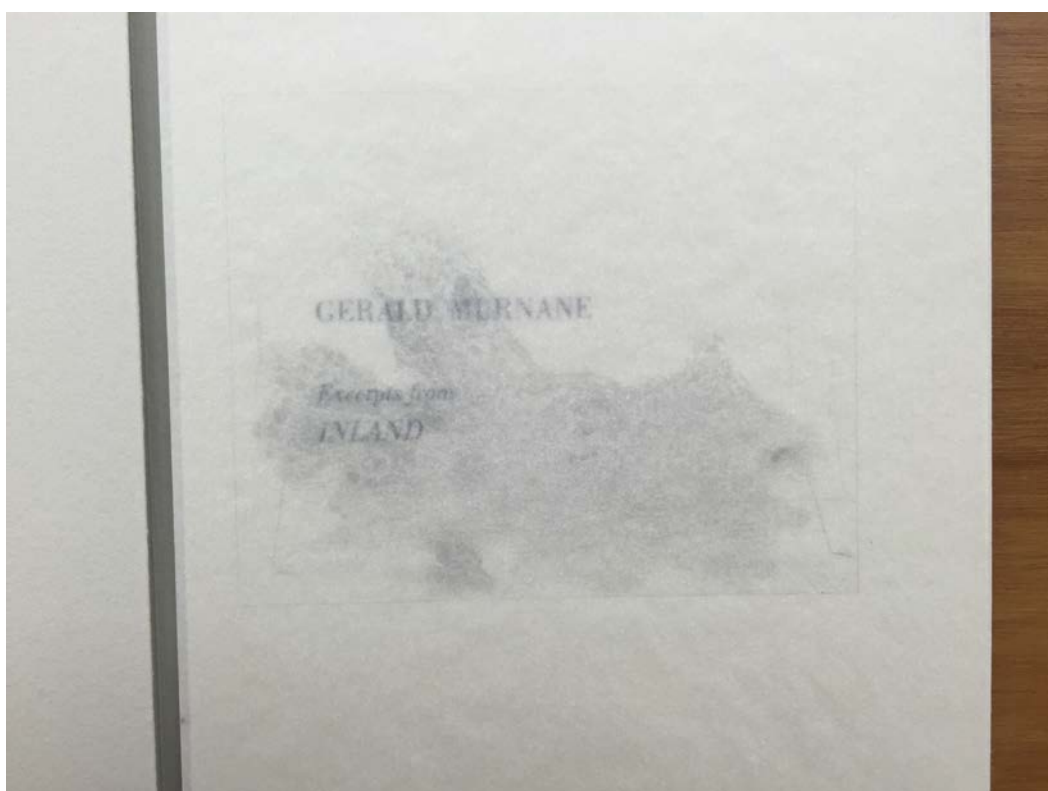




c)



d)



e)

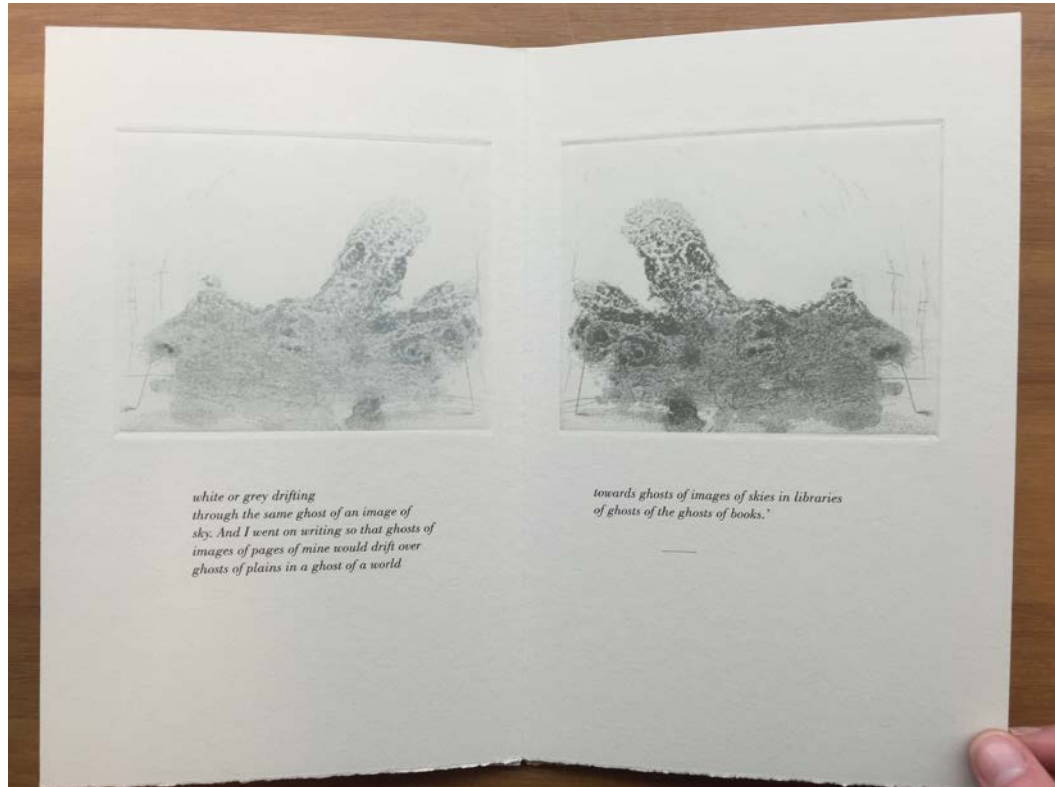


f)





g)



## Chapter Three

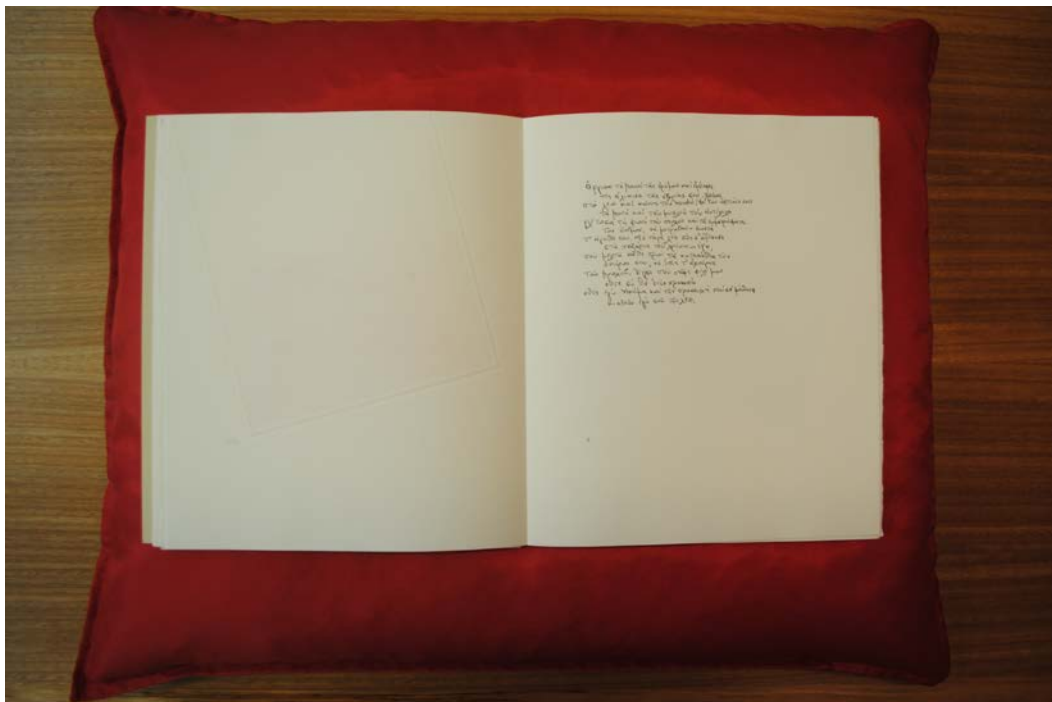
Figure 1

Petr Herel, Dimitris Tsaloumas (writer), Philip Grundy (translator), *The Distant Present: Three Poems from the Book of Epigrams* (Melbourne: Uncollected Works Press, 2011), 3/17, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



b)



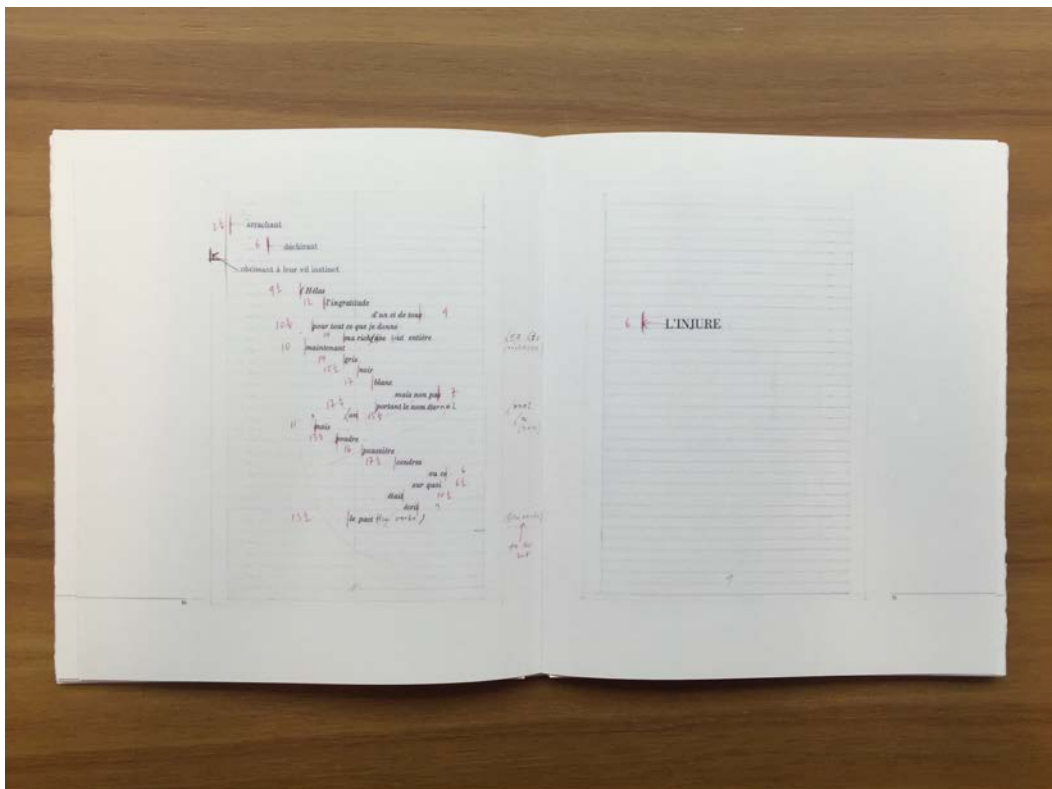
c)



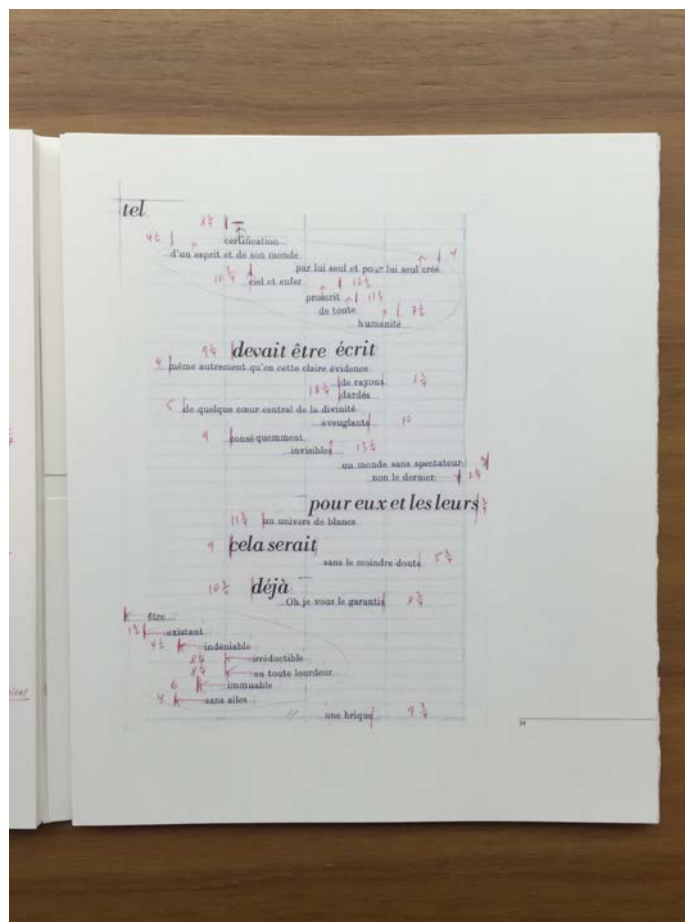
**Figure 2**

Petr Herel, Stéphane Mallarmé (poet), Christopher Brennan (poet), François Boisivon (translator), Peter Brown (translator), Chris Wallace-Crabbe (contributor), Daniel Leuwers (contributor), Thierry Bouchard (typographer), Caren Florance (cover), *Delicate Interactions* (Melbourne: Uncollected Works Press, 2013), 12/15, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

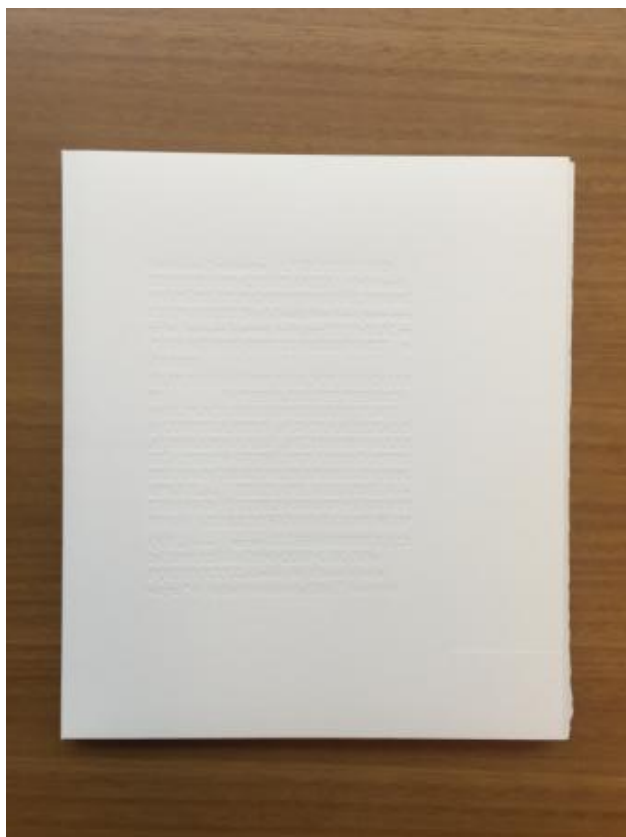
a)



b)



c)



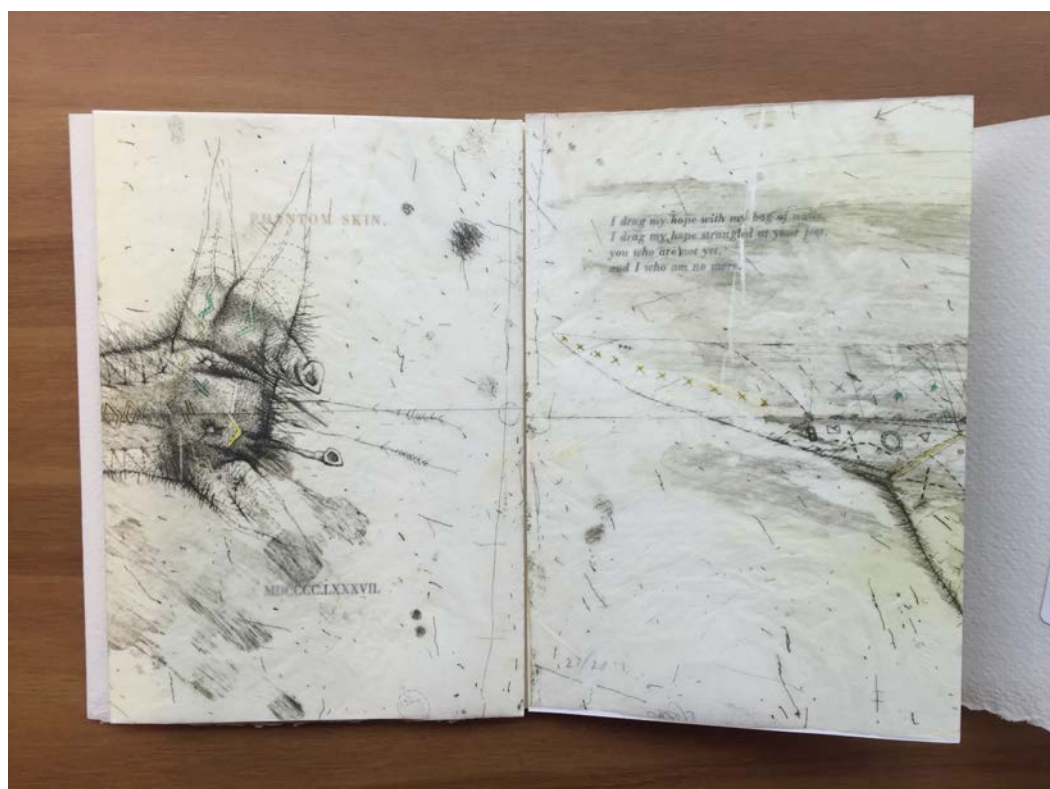
### Figure 3

Petr Herel, René Daumal (poet), Dorothy Catherine Davis (translator), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *La Peau du Fantôme* = *Phantom Skin* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1987), 27/28, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)

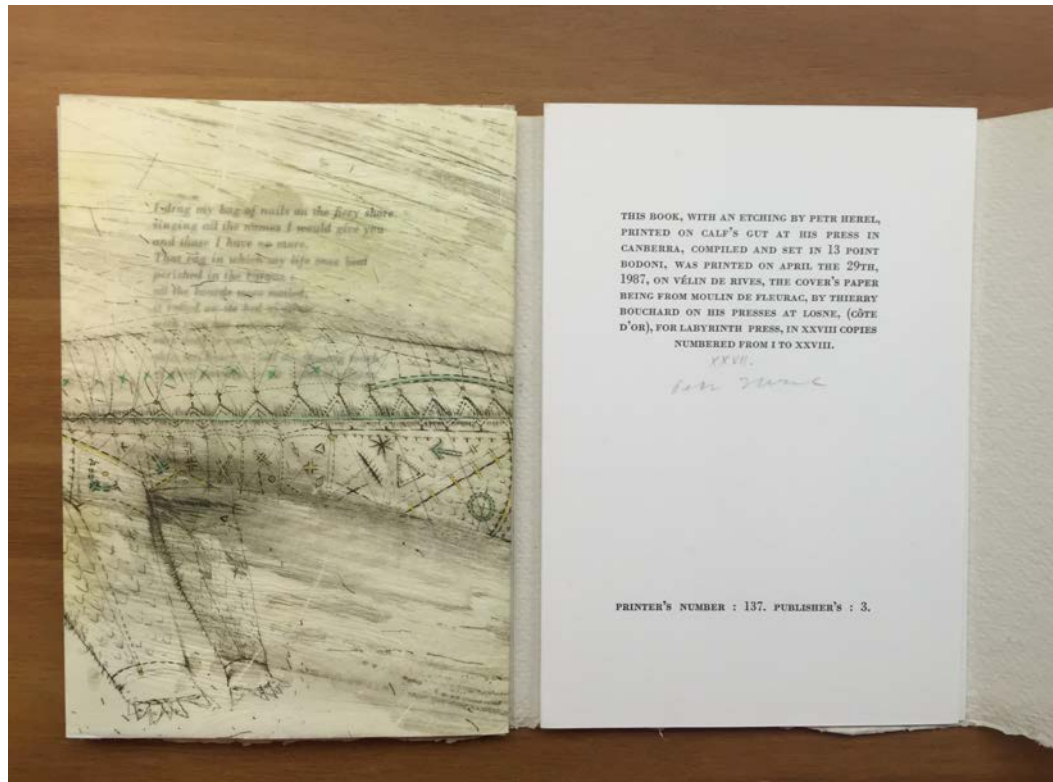


b)





c)



d)



**Figure 4**

Petr Herel, *Borges Sequel* (Sydney: Rudy Komon, 1982), National Library of Australia, Canberra.

**a)**



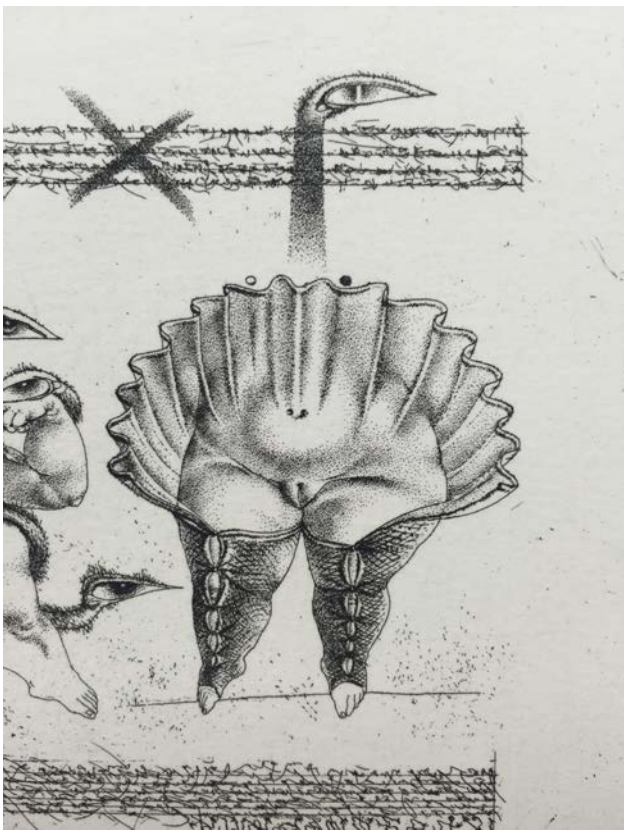
**b)**



c)

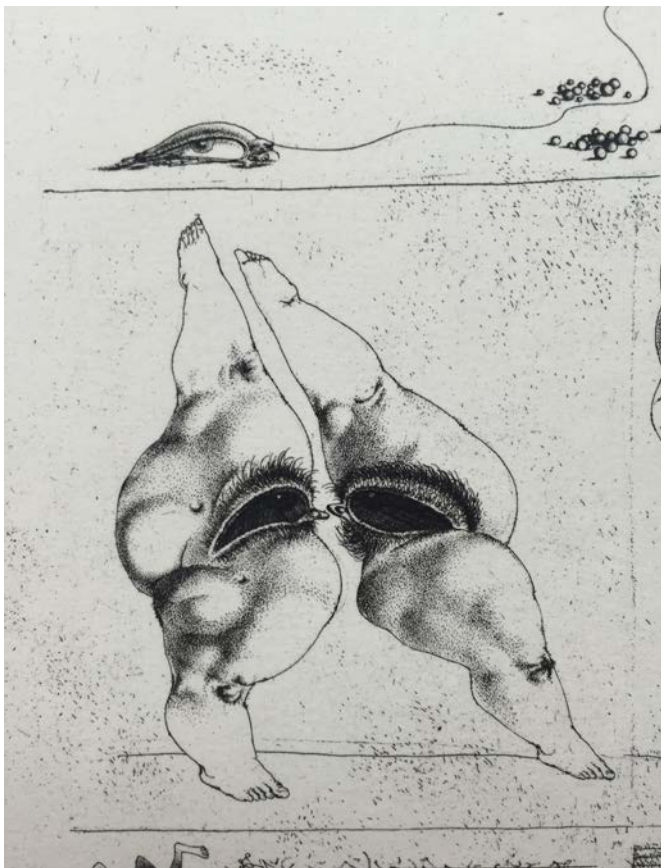


d)





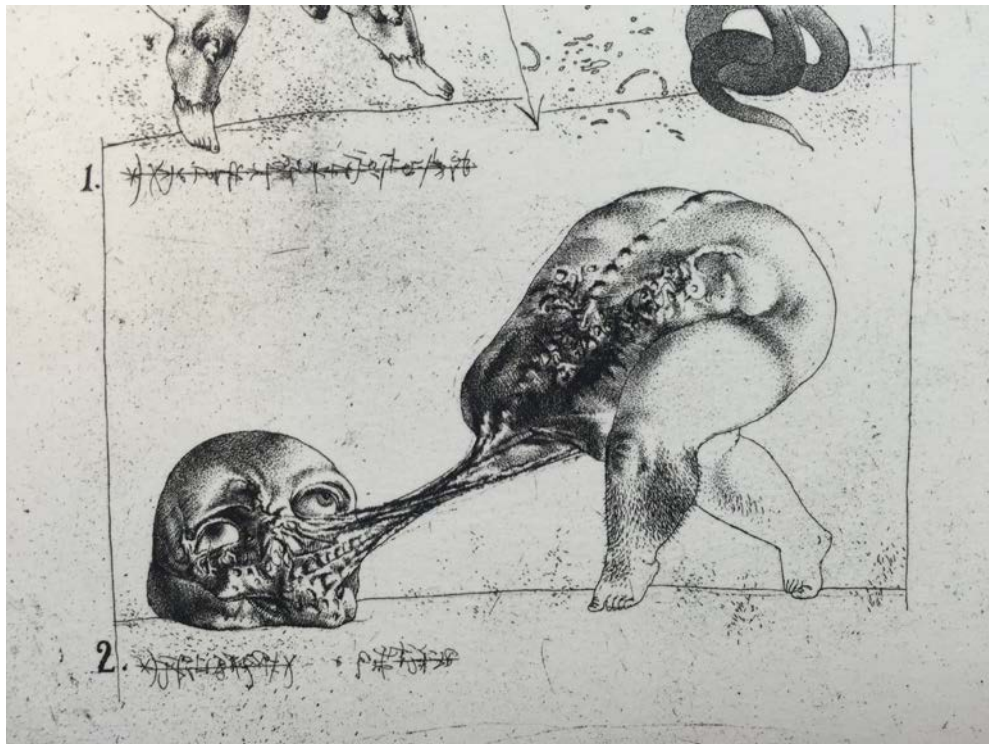
e)



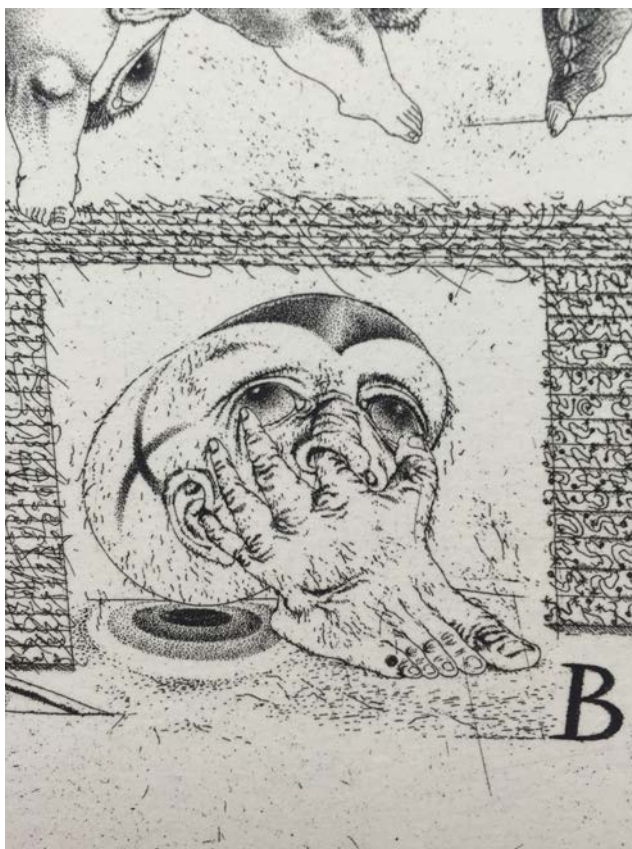
f)



g)



h)



i)



j)





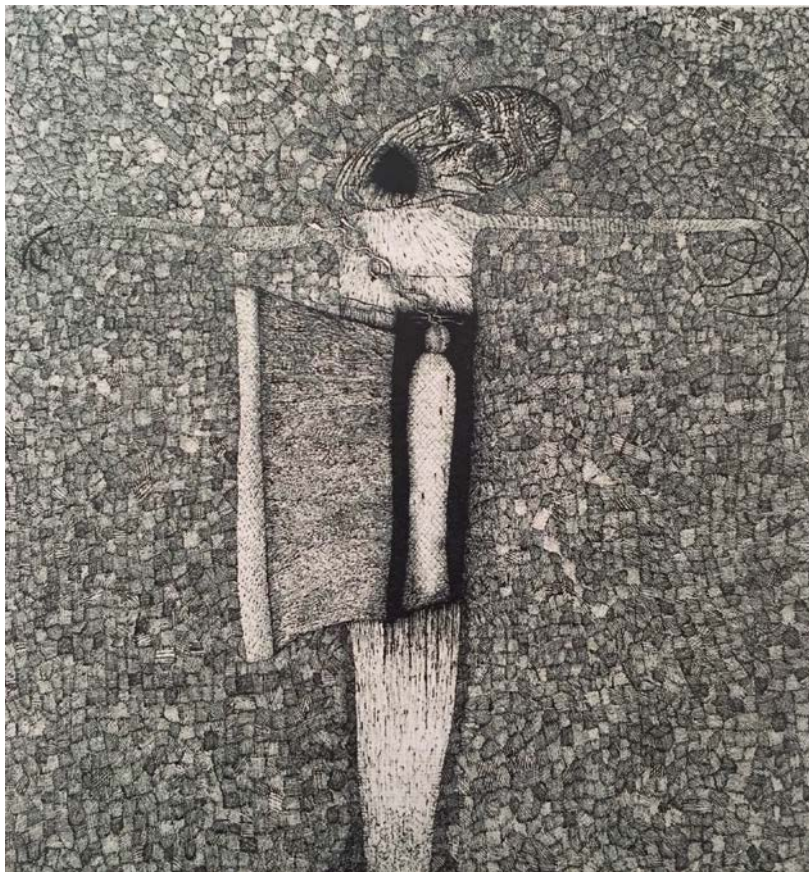
**Figure 5**

Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1486, tempera on canvas, 172.5 x 278.9cm, Uffizi, Florence. Courtesy of the Uffizi.



**Figure 6**

Nick Blinko, *Crucified*, c. 1990, drawing in black ink, dimensions unknown, collection unknown.



**Figure 7**

Hans Bellmer, *La Poupée (The Doll)*, 1935, gelatin silver print, 24.13 x 18.1 cm, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.



**Figure 8**

Murielle Belin, untitled figure from the series *Sculptures Empaillées*, 2007-2012, mixed media taxidermy, measurements unknown, La Halle Saint Pierre, Paris.





**Figure 9**

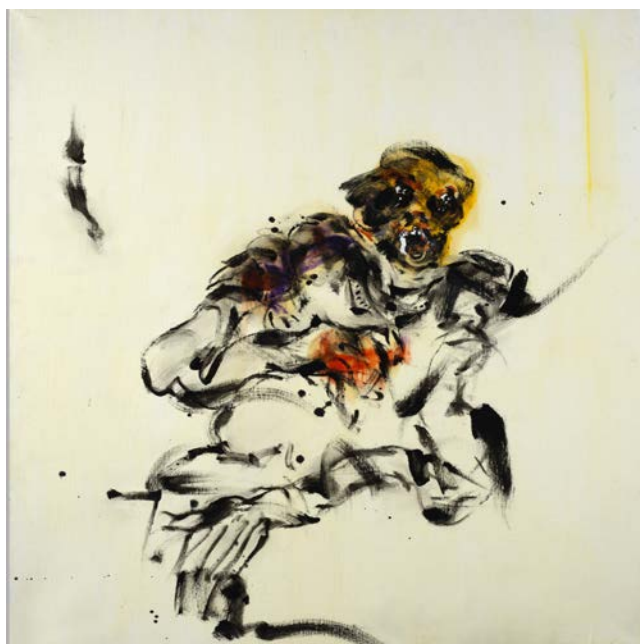
Joel-Peter Witkin, *Feast of the Fools, Mexico City*, from the book *Twelve Photographs*, 1993, 1990, photogravure, dimensions unknown, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago.

NB: While this work is not part of La Halle Saint Pierre's collection, it is typical of Witkin's style.



**Figure 10**

Stani Nitkowski, *Le Ventre Vierge*, 1989, mixed media, 92.0 x 73.0 cm, La Halle Saint Pierre, Paris.



**Figure 11**

Zoran Mušič, *Nous ne sommes pas les derniers*, 1971, oil on canvas, measurements unknown, La Halle Saint Pierre, Paris.



## Chapter Four

Figure 1

Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Poster Poem (Le Circus)*, 1964, screenprint on paper, 43.2 x 56.0 cm, Tate Modern, London. Courtesy of the Tate Modern.

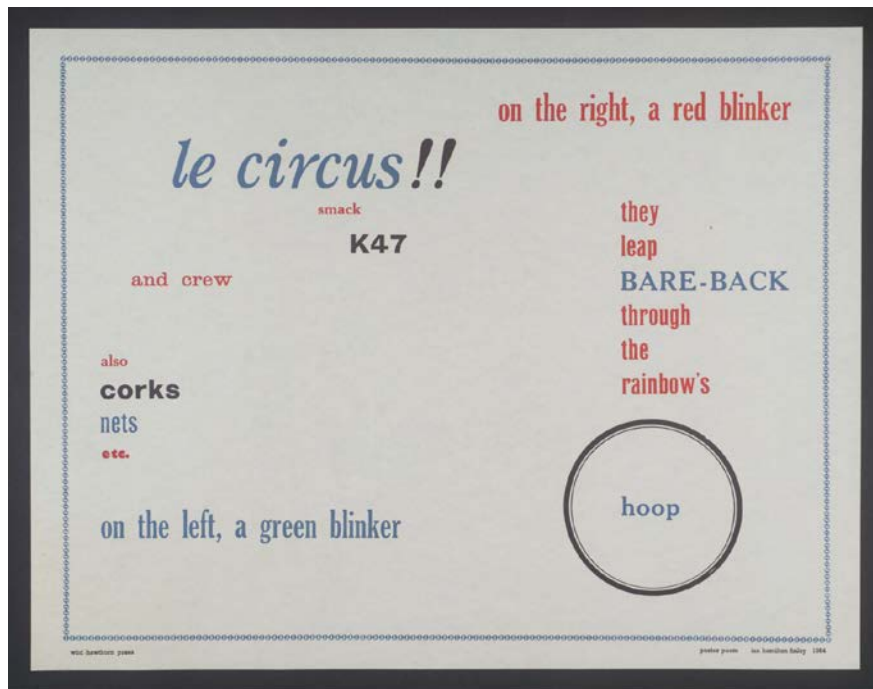
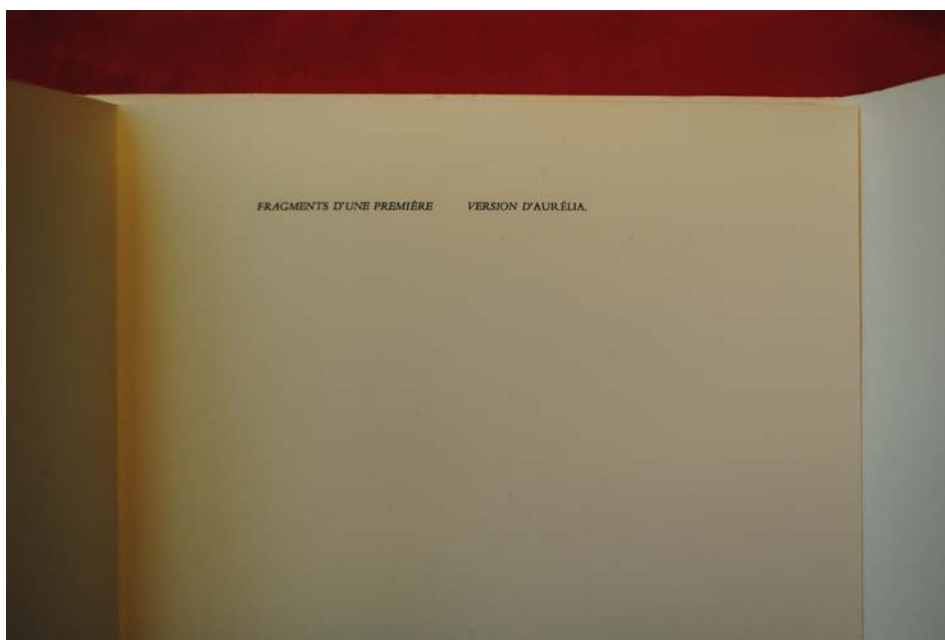


Figure 2

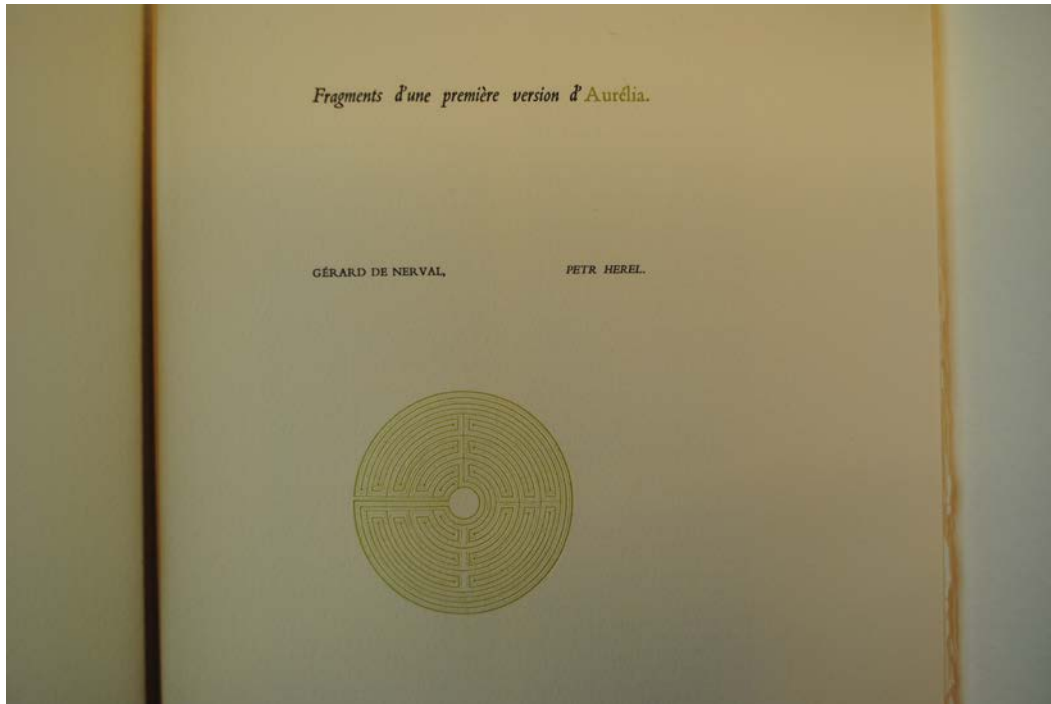
Petr Herel, Gérard de Nerval (writer), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Fragments d'une Première Version d'Aurélia* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1994), 16/49, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)

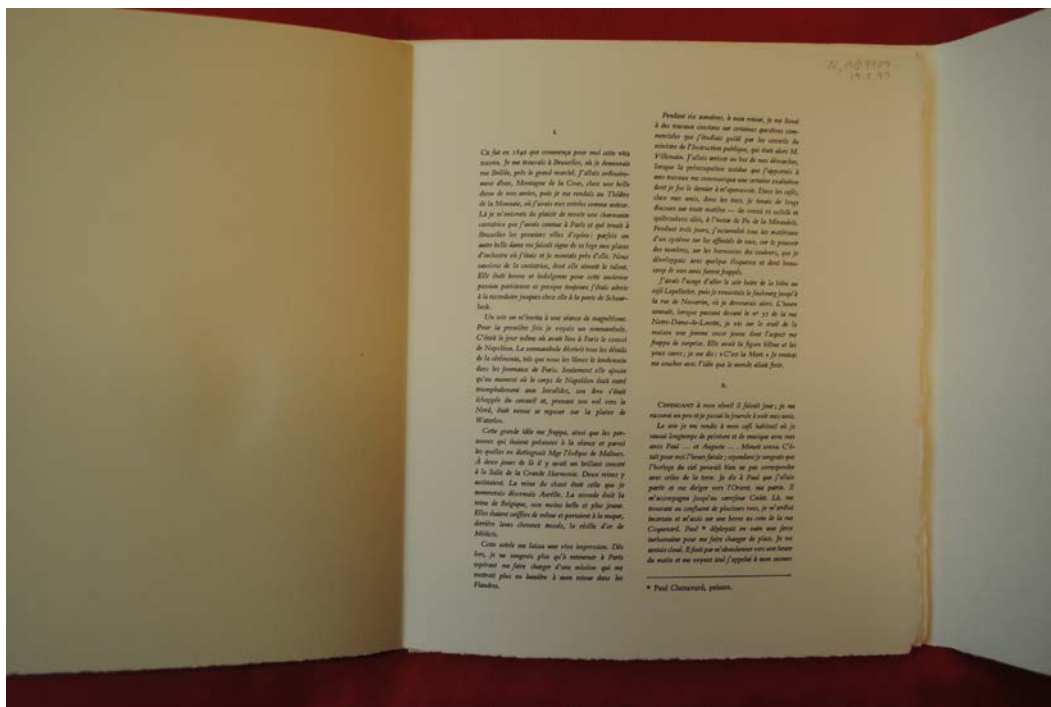




b)



c)





f)

h)



**Figure 3**

Artist unknown, *Glasgow Hours*, c. 1460, illuminated manuscript with illustrations in gold leaf, 23.0 x 17.0 cm, Glasgow University Library, Glasgow. By permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.





**Figure 4**

Shaikh Hamdullah ibn Mustafa Dede, *Album of Calligraphies Including Poetry and Prophetic Traditions (Hadith)*, ca. 1500, ink, watercolour and gold on marbled paper, 32.1 x 28.8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



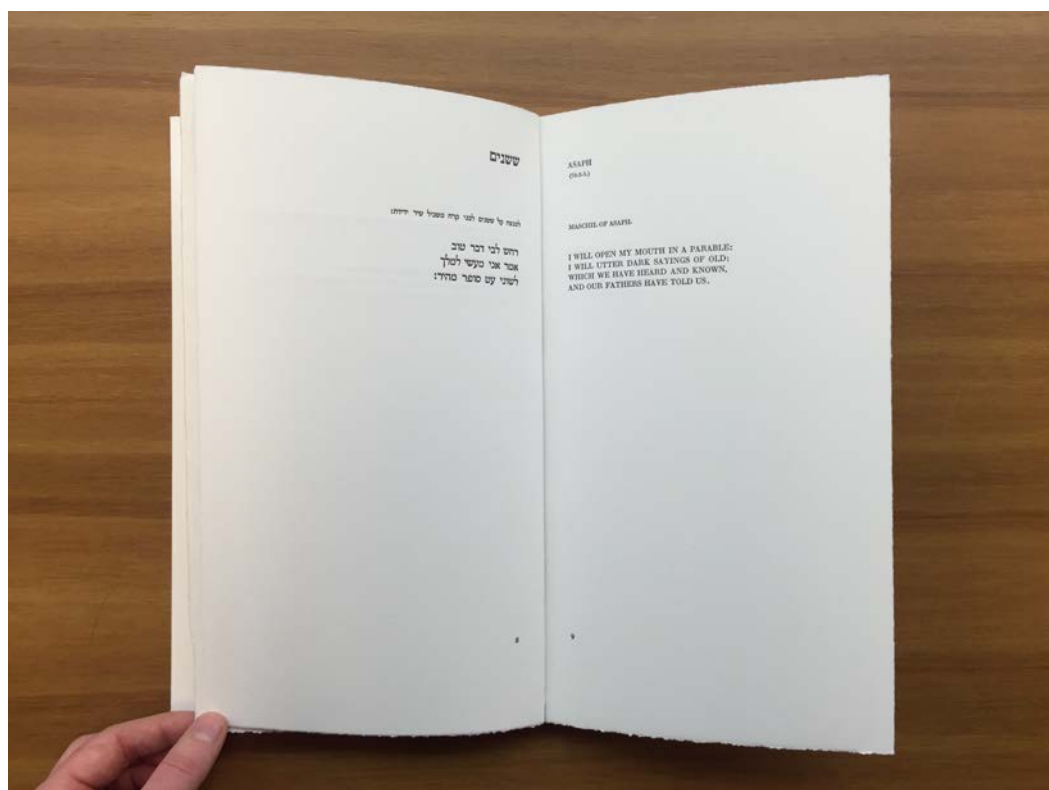
**Figure 5**

Petr Herel, Robert Barnes (introduction), Ulrike Sturm (printmaker), *Psalms* (Canberra: Graphic Investigation Workshop, 1996), 16/20, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

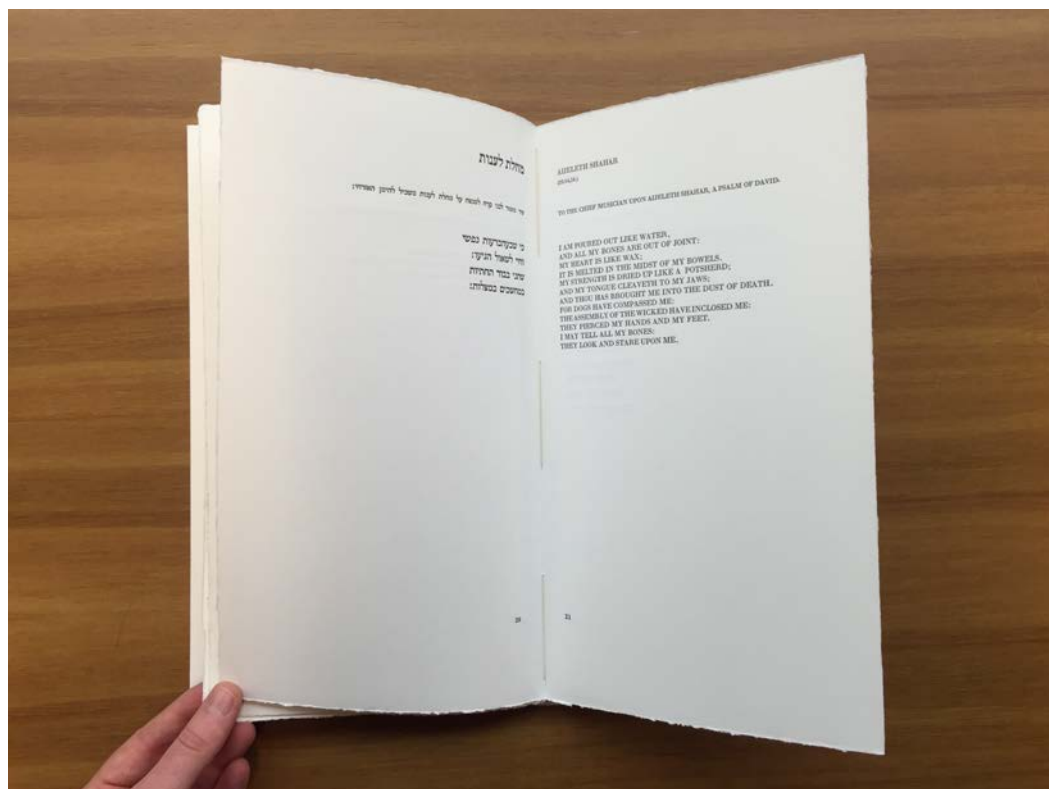
a)



b)



c)



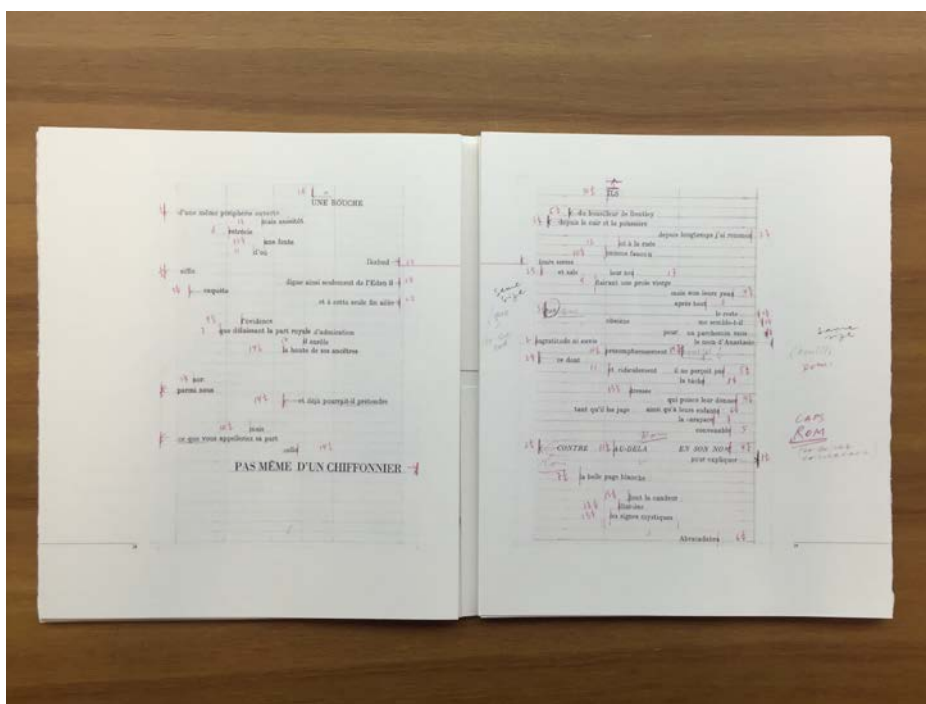
**Figure 6**

Petr Herel, Stéphane Mallarmé (poet), Christopher Brennan (poet), François Boisivon (translator), Peter Brown (translator), Chris Wallace-Crabbe (contributor), Daniel Leuwers (contributor), Thierry Bouchard (typographer), Caren Florance (cover), *Delicate Interactions* (Melbourne: Uncollected Works Press, 2013), 12/15, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

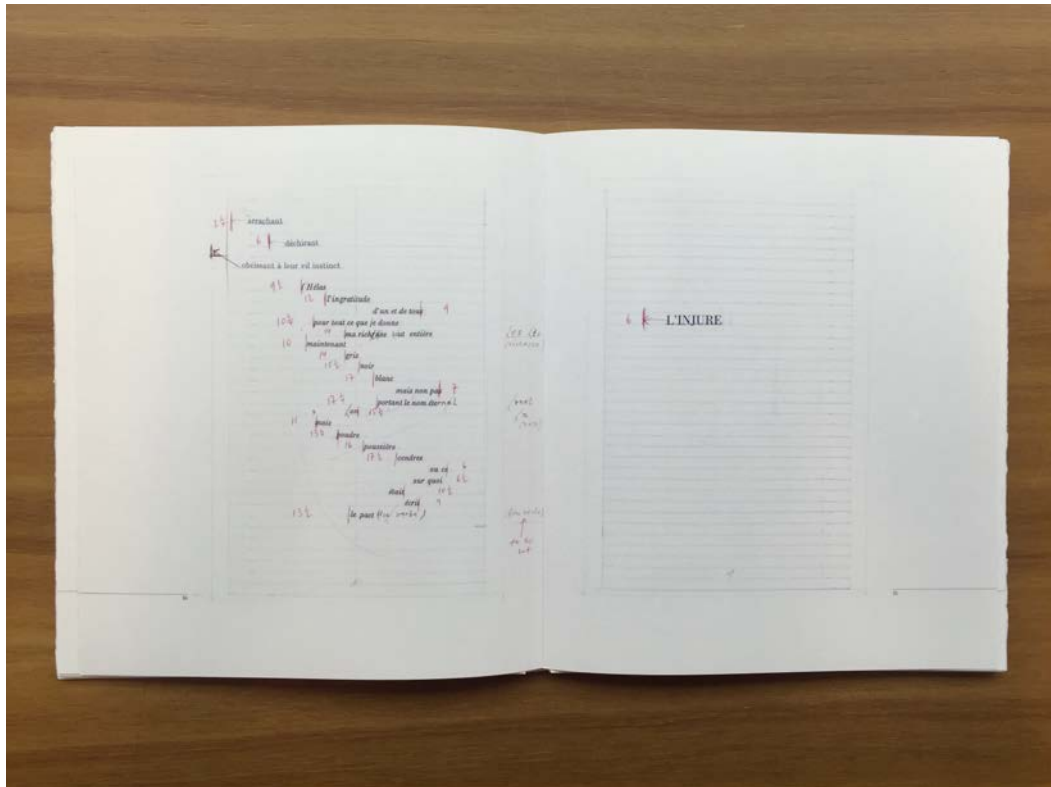
a)



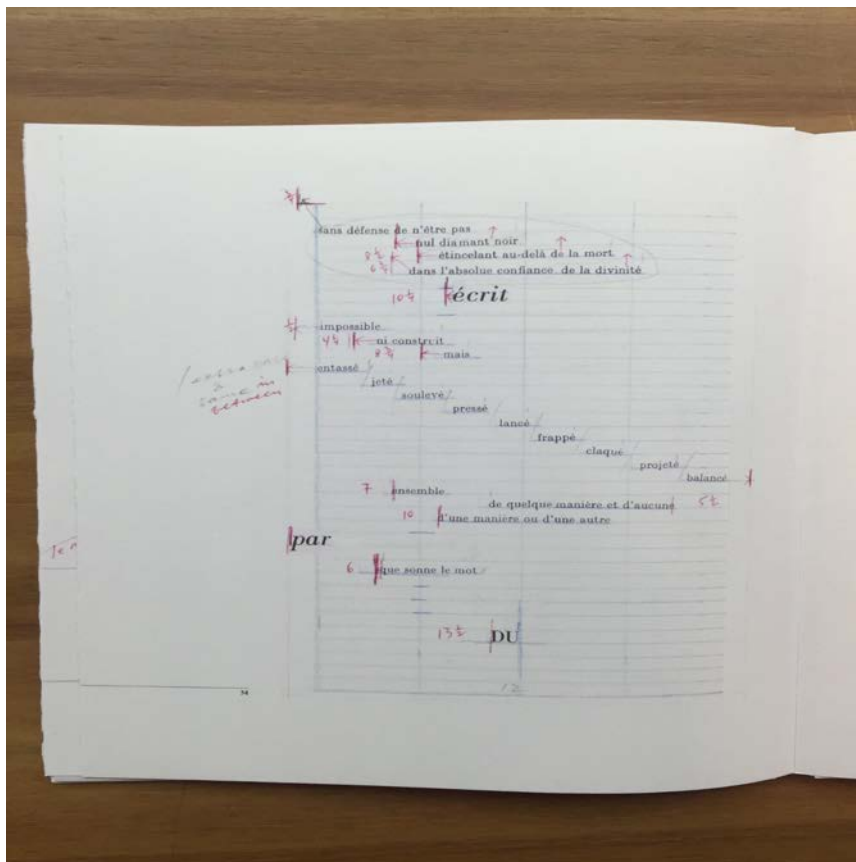
b)



c)



d)





[illegible]

dans défense de n'être pas ?  
 8<sup>e</sup> K pul diamant noir.  
 8<sup>e</sup> K étincelant au-delà de la mort  
 dans l'absolue confiance de la divinité  
 10<sup>e</sup> écrit  
 impossible  
 4<sup>e</sup> K ni construit  
 8<sup>e</sup> K mais  
 entasse  
 jeté  
 soulevé  
 pressé  
 lancé  
 frappé  
 claqué  
 projeté  
 balance  
 7 ensemble  
 de quelque manière et d'aucune  
 10 l'une manière ou d'une autre  
 5<sup>e</sup>  
 par  
 6 que sonne le mot  
 13<sup>e</sup> DU  
 12

Figure 7

Max Ernst, *Maximiliana: The Illegal Practice of Astronomy: Hommage à Dorothea Tanning* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1974).

a)



b)



c)



**Figure 8**

Paul Klee, *Legend of the Nile*, 1937, pastel on cotton cloth mounted on burlap, 69.0 x 61.0 cm, Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern. Courtesy of the Kunstmuseum.

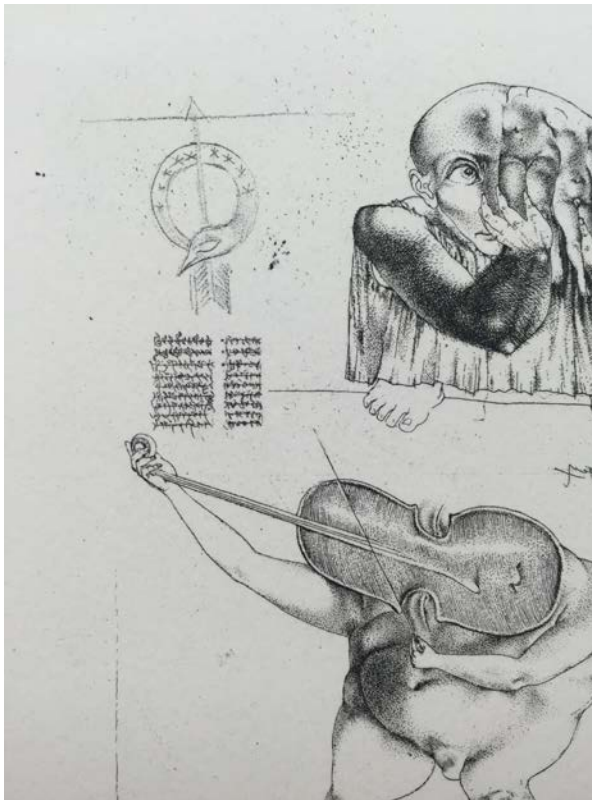




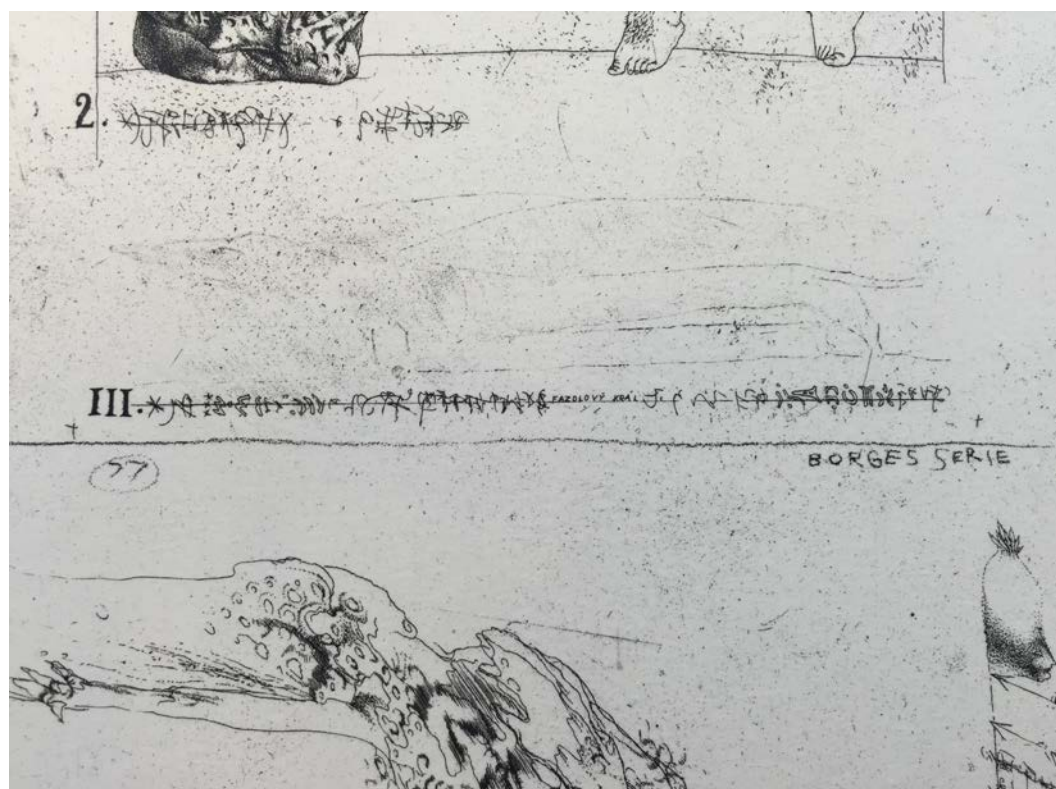
**Figure 9**

Petr Herel, *Borges Sequel* (Sydney: Rudy Komon, 1982), National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



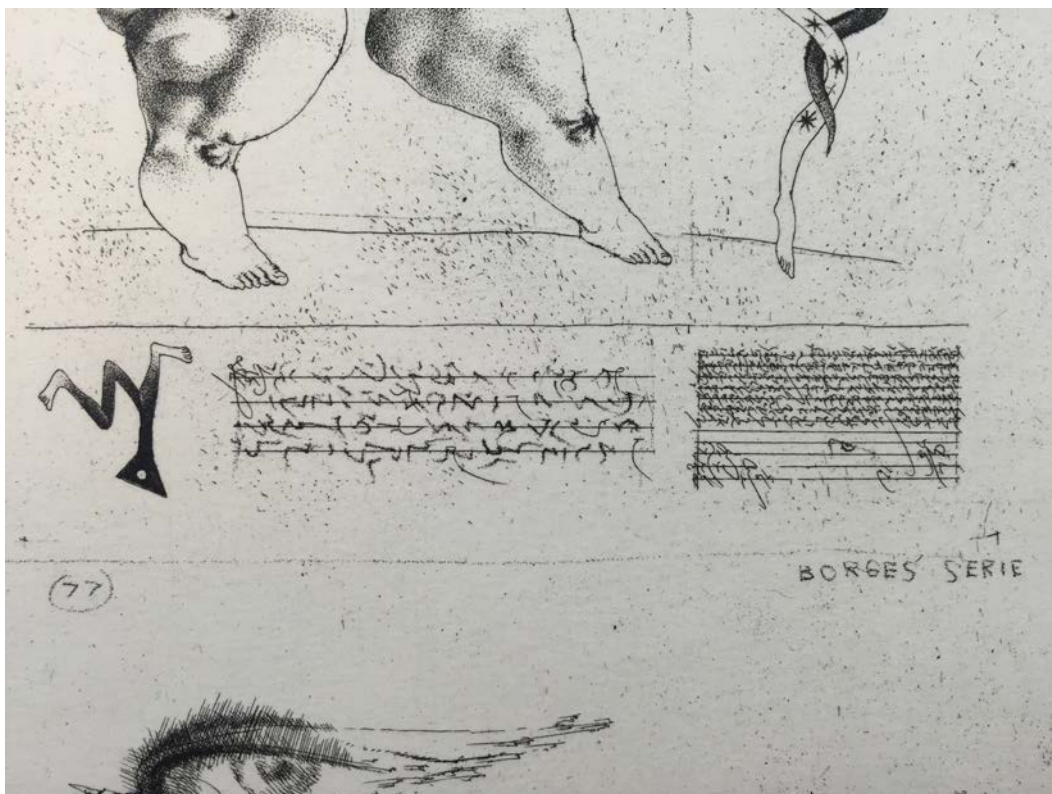
b)



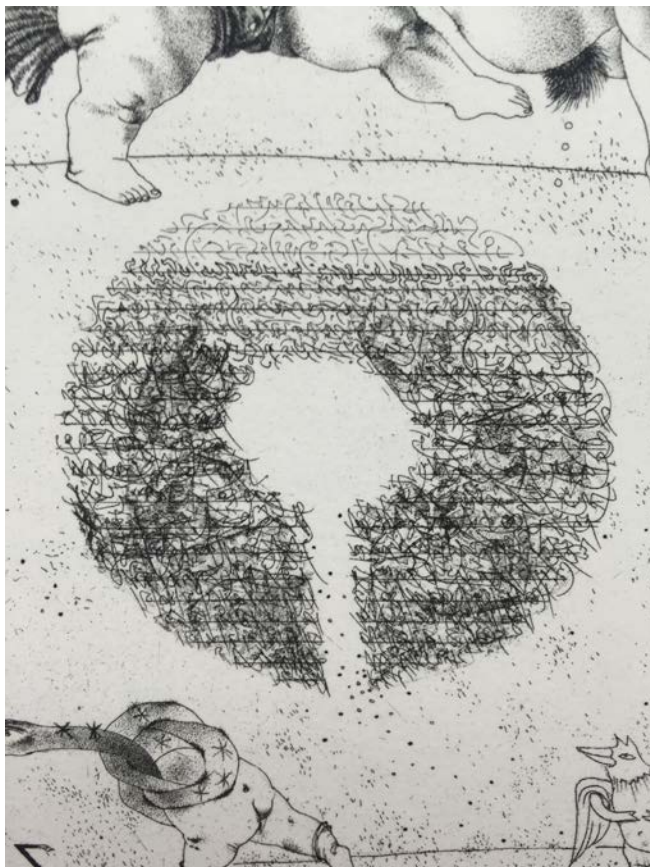
c)



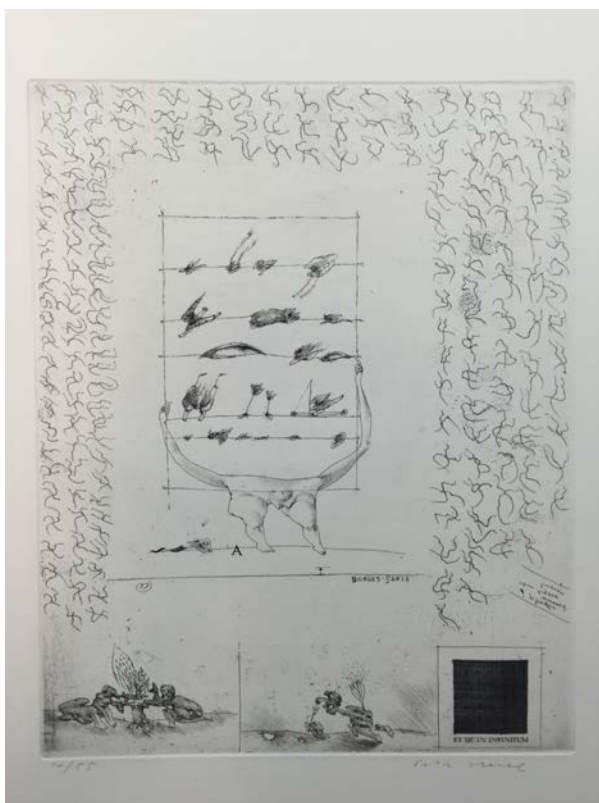
d)



e)

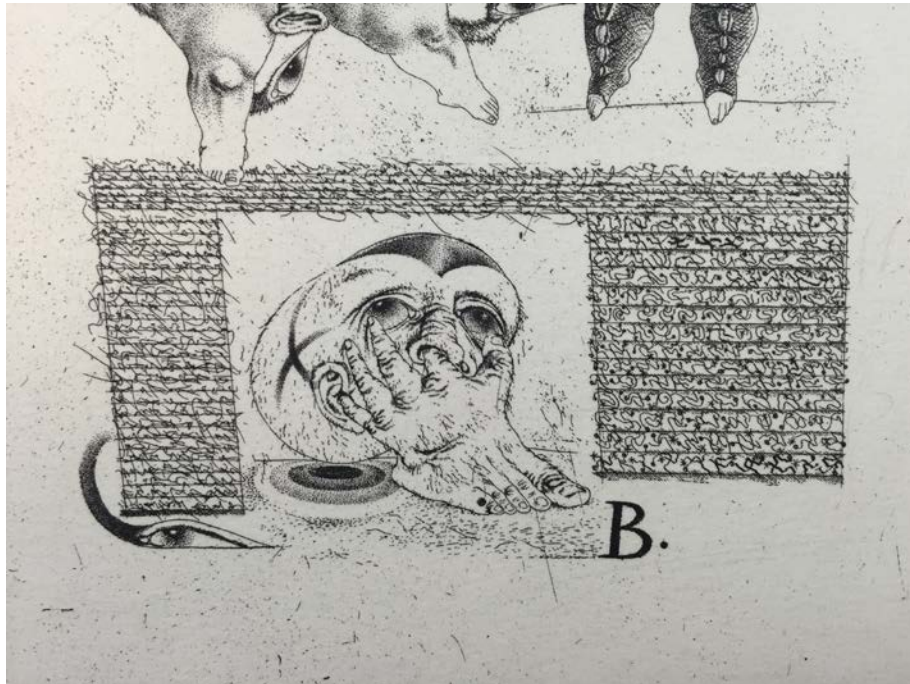


f)





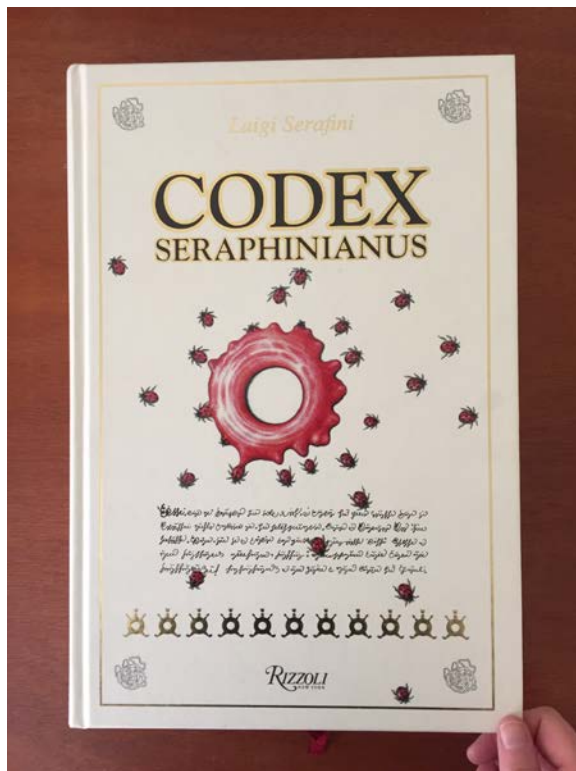
g)



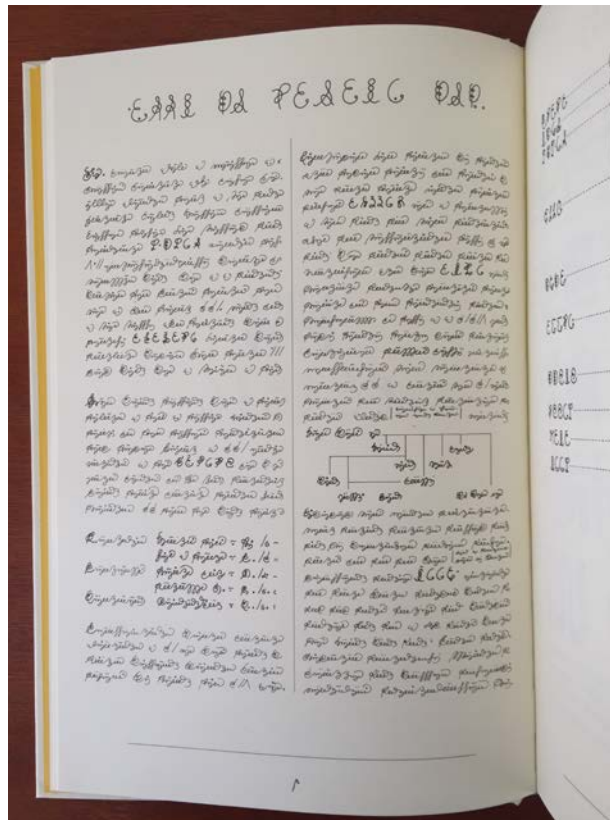
**Figure 10**

Luigi Serafini, *Codex Seraphinianus* (New York: Rizzoli, 2013).

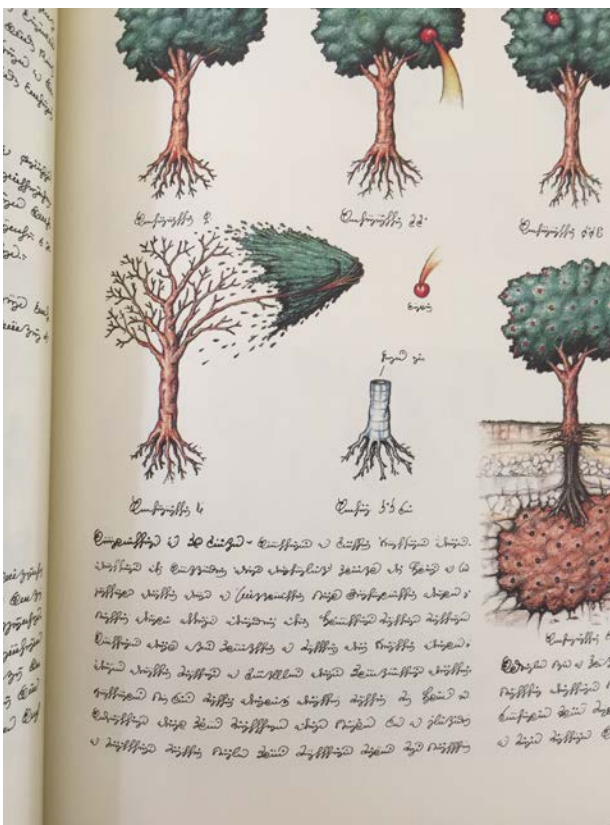
a)



b)



c)

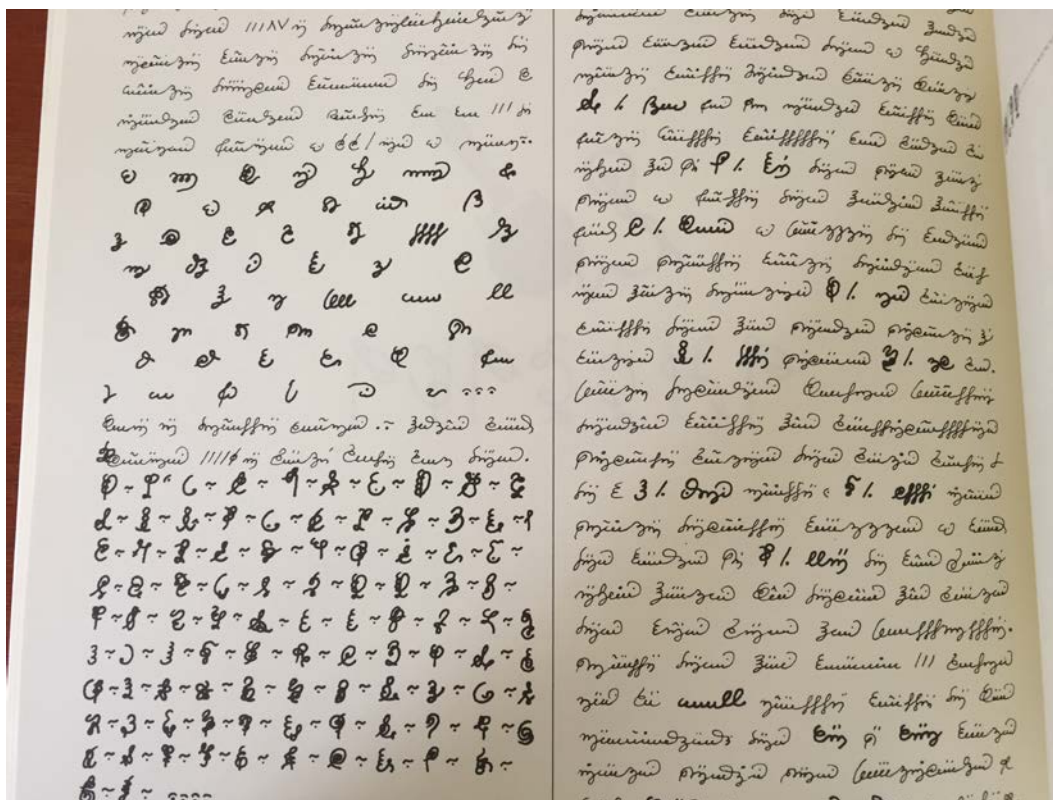




d)



e)



## Chapter Five

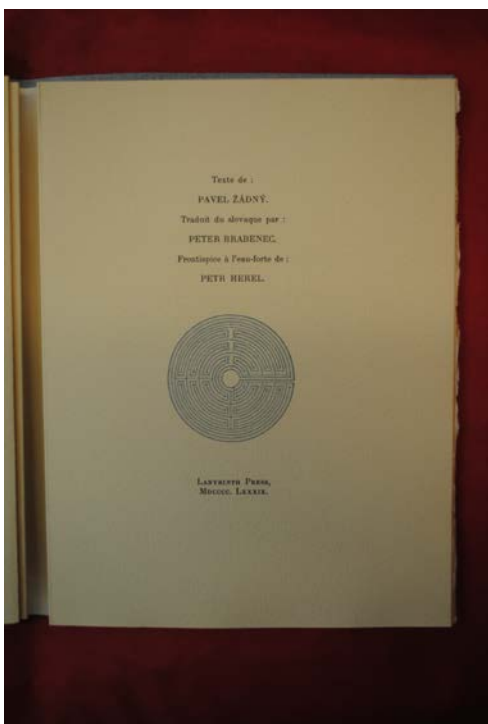
Figure 1

Richard of Haldingham and Lafford, *Hereford Mappa Mundi*, ca. 1300, coloured inks on vellum, 159.0 x 134cm, The Hereford Cathedral Chained Library, Herefordshire.



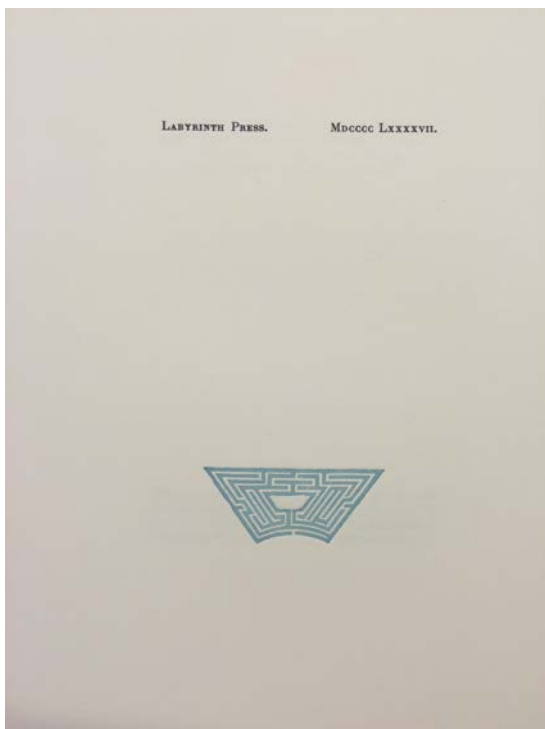
Figure 2

Petr Herel, Pavel Žádný(writer), Peter Brabenec (translator), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *La Neige, un Souvenir de Matyáš Bernard Braun = Sneh, Spomienka na Matyáš Bernarda Brauna* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1989), 12/33, National Library of Australia, Canberra.



**Figure 3**

Petr Herel, Bohuslav Reynka (writer), Jiří (Michel) Reynek(translator), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Večerní okna = Fenêtres sur le soir* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1997), 31/35, National Library of Australia, Canberra.



**Figure 4**

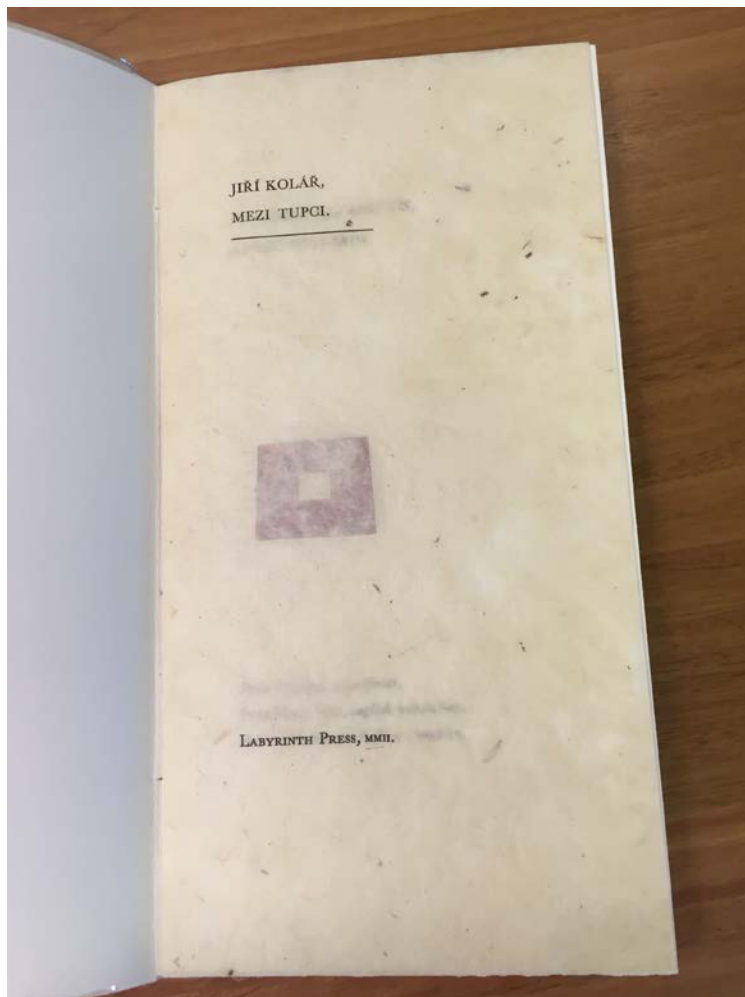
Petr Herel, Aristotle (writer), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Aristote = Aristoteles* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1986), 18/26, National Library of Australia, Canberra.



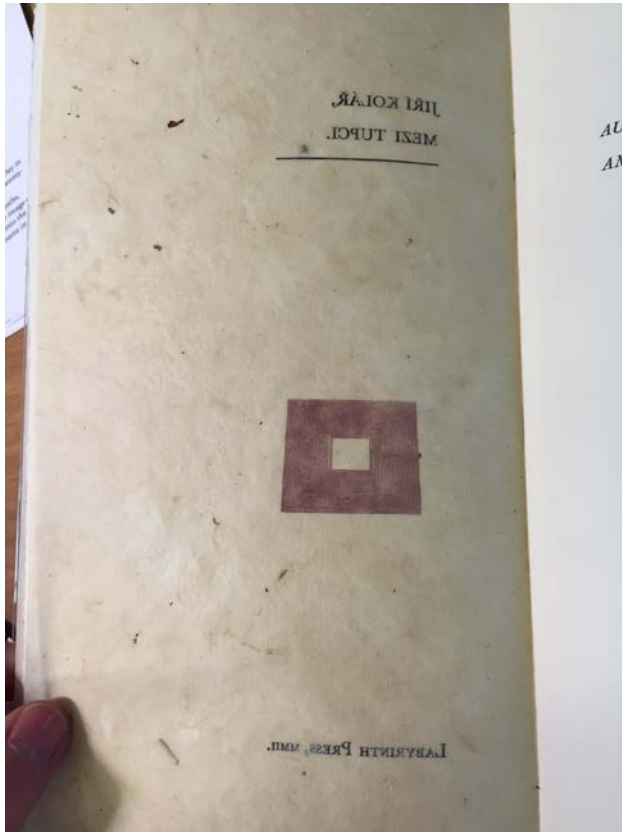
**Figure 5**

Petr Herel, Jiří Kolář (writer), Ivan Haškovec (translator), Henry Herel (translator), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Mezi Tupci* = *Au Milieu des Abrutis* = *Among Dullards* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 2002), 2/21, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

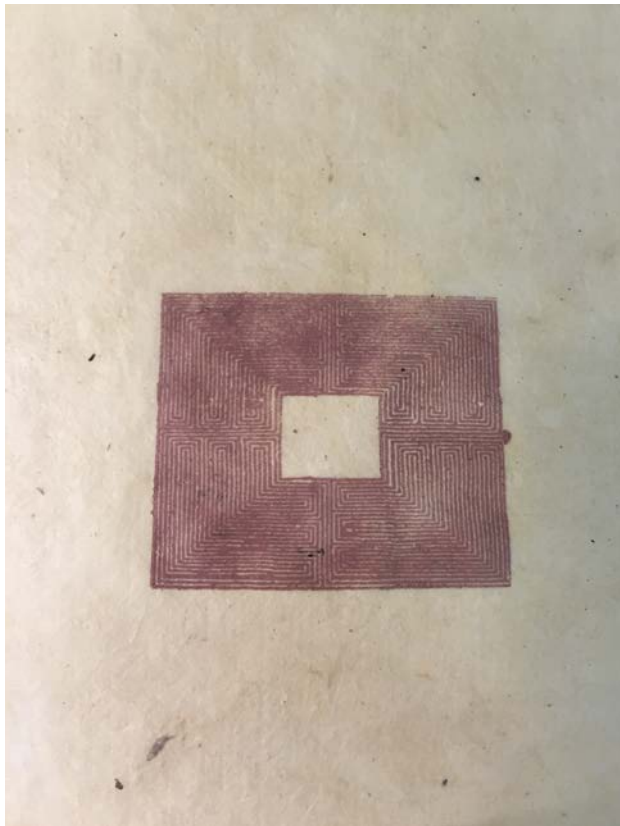
a)



b)



c)





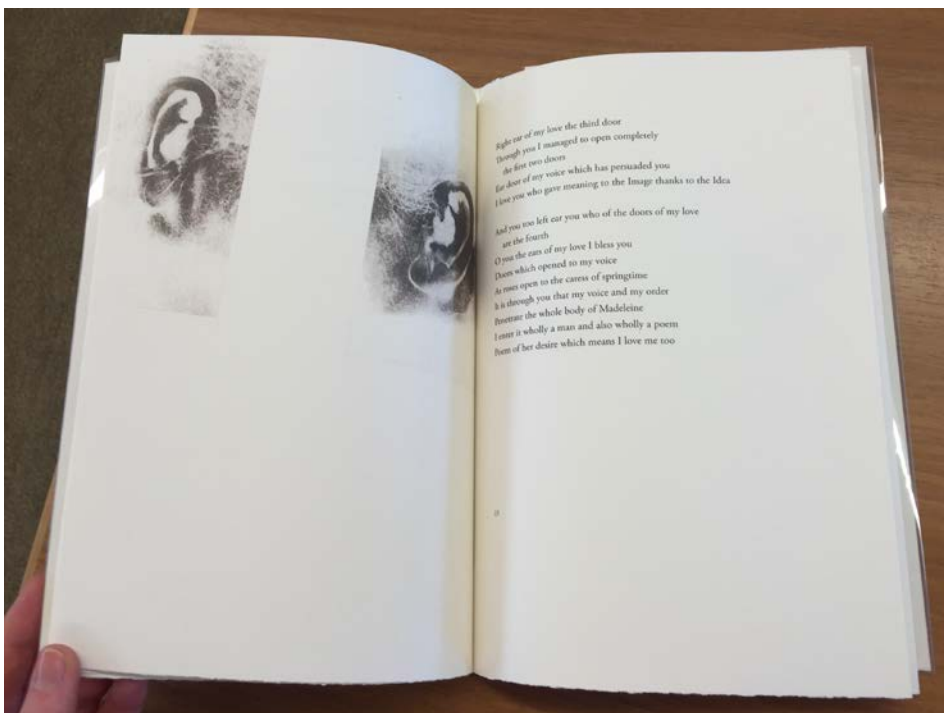
**Figure 6**

Petr Herel, Guillaume Apollinaire (writer), James Grieve (translator), *The Nine Doors to Your Body* (Melbourne: Uncollected Works Press, 2011), 9/10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

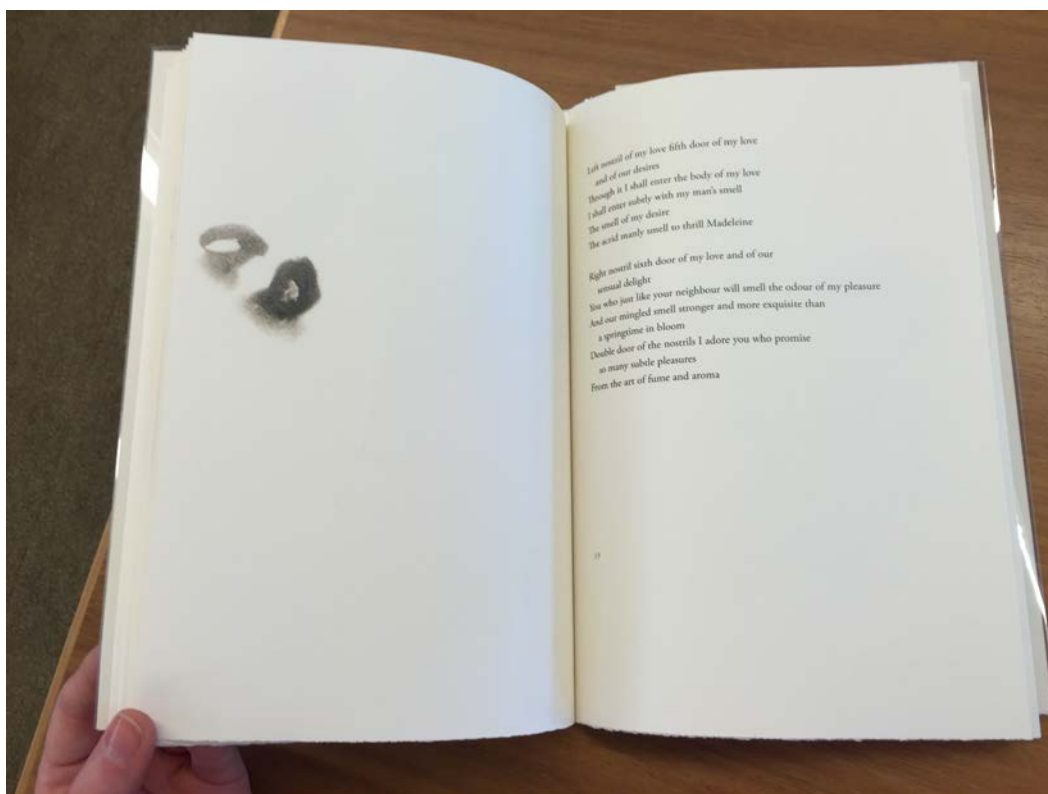
a)



b)



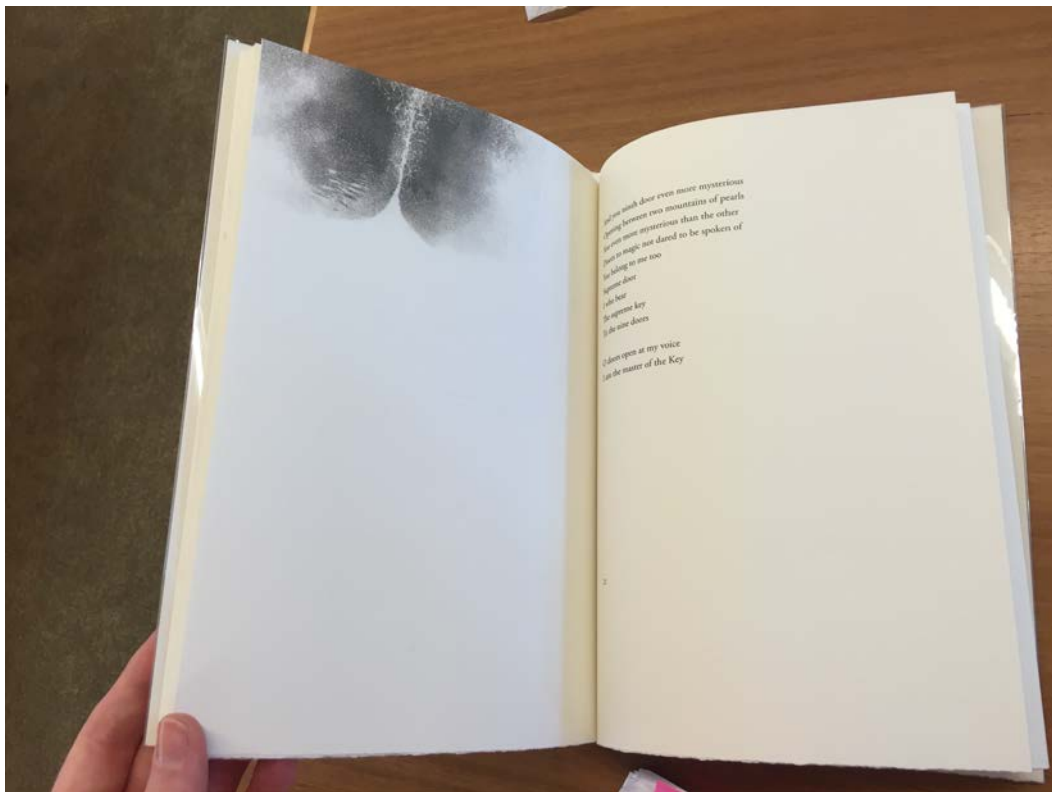
c)



d)



e)



**Figure 7**

Petr Herel, Pierre Chapuis (writer), Dagmar Halasová (translator), Jean-Édouard Augsburguer (paper sculptor), Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Sur le pont Charles* = *Na Karlově mostě* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1997), 4/60, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)

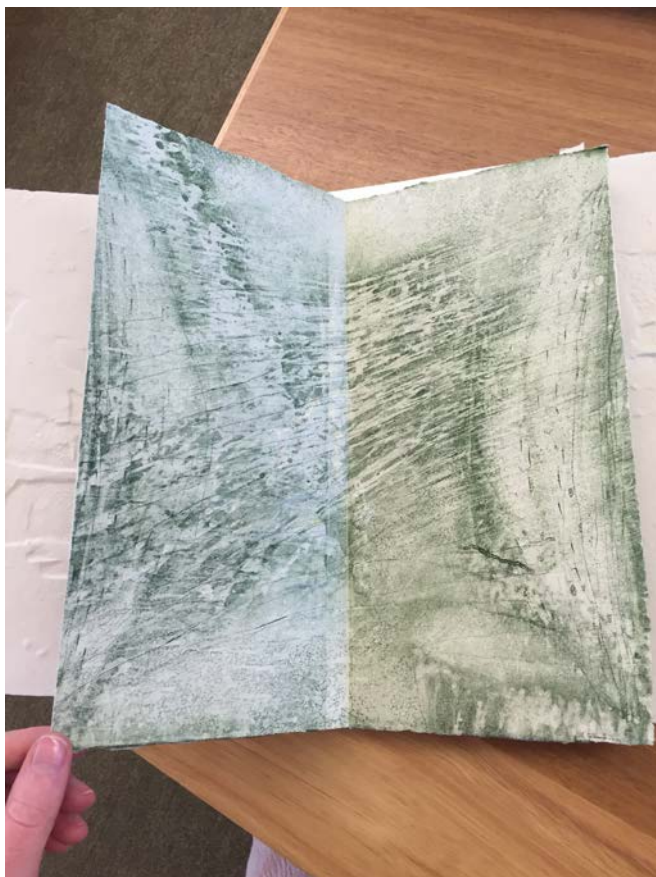




b)



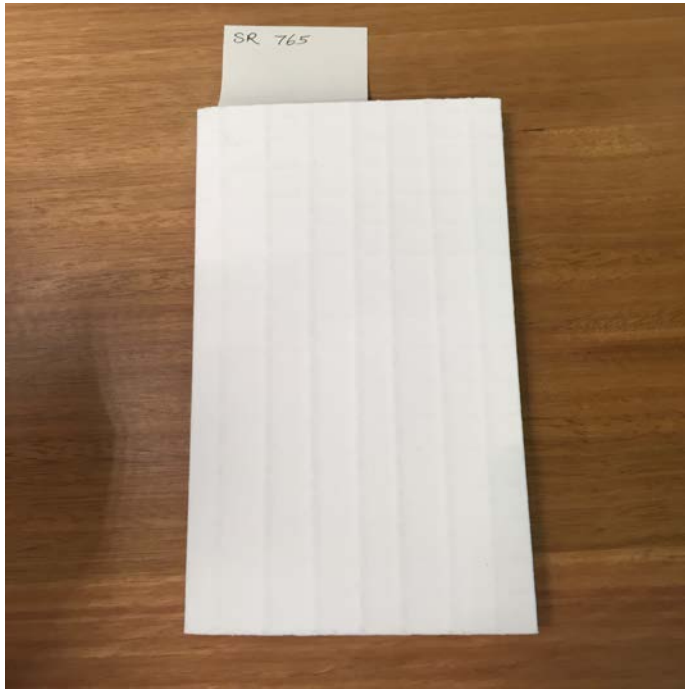
c)



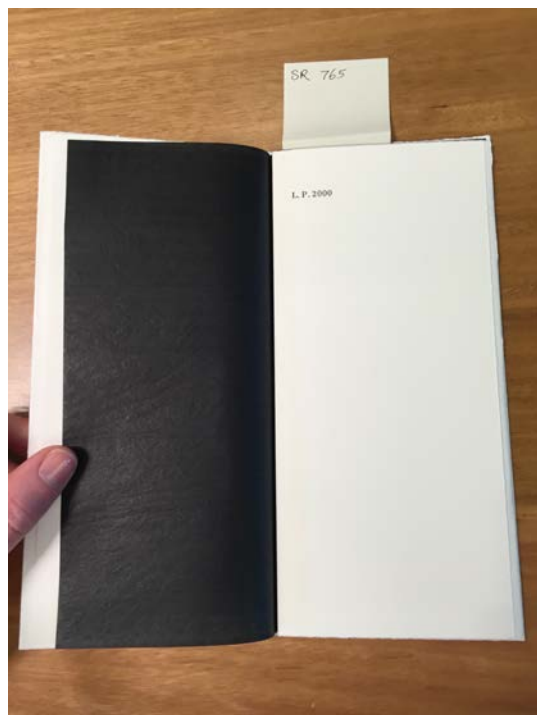
**Figure 8**

Petr Herel, Jan Marius Tomsš (writer), *Stesk* (Canberra: Petr Herel, 2000), 2/9, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



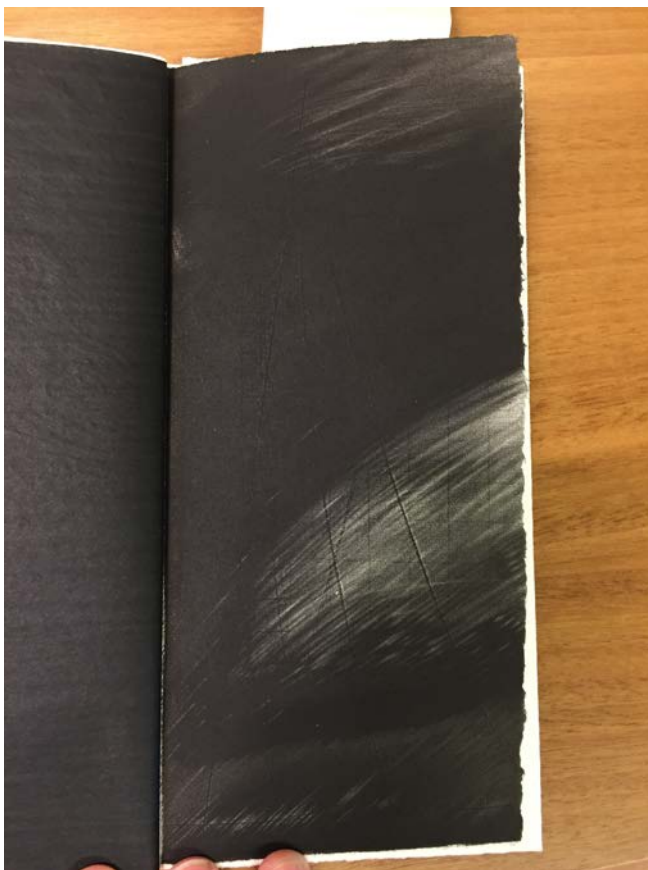
b)



c)



d)



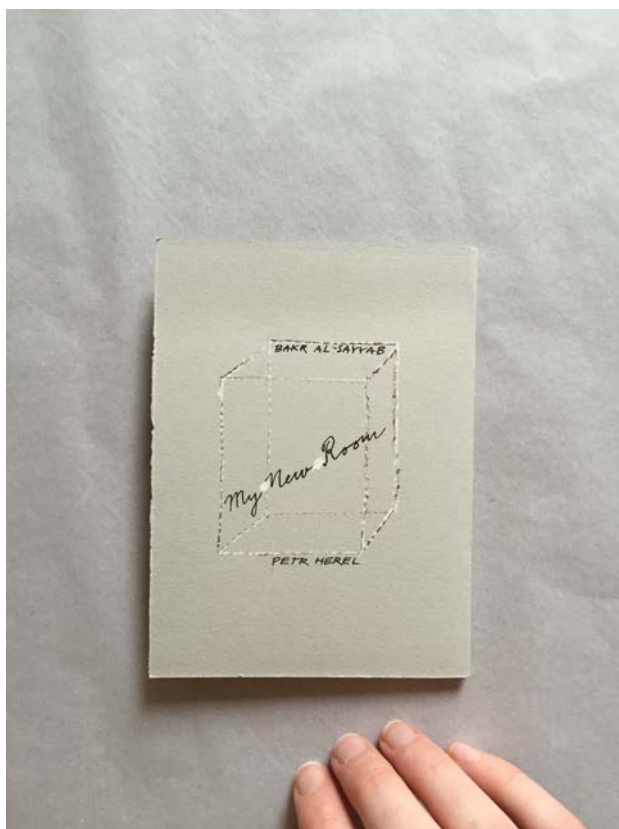
**Figure 9**

Petr Herel, Badr Shakir al Sayyab (poet), *My New Room* (Melbourne: Petr Herel 2010), unique copy, artist's collection, Melbourne.

a)



b)





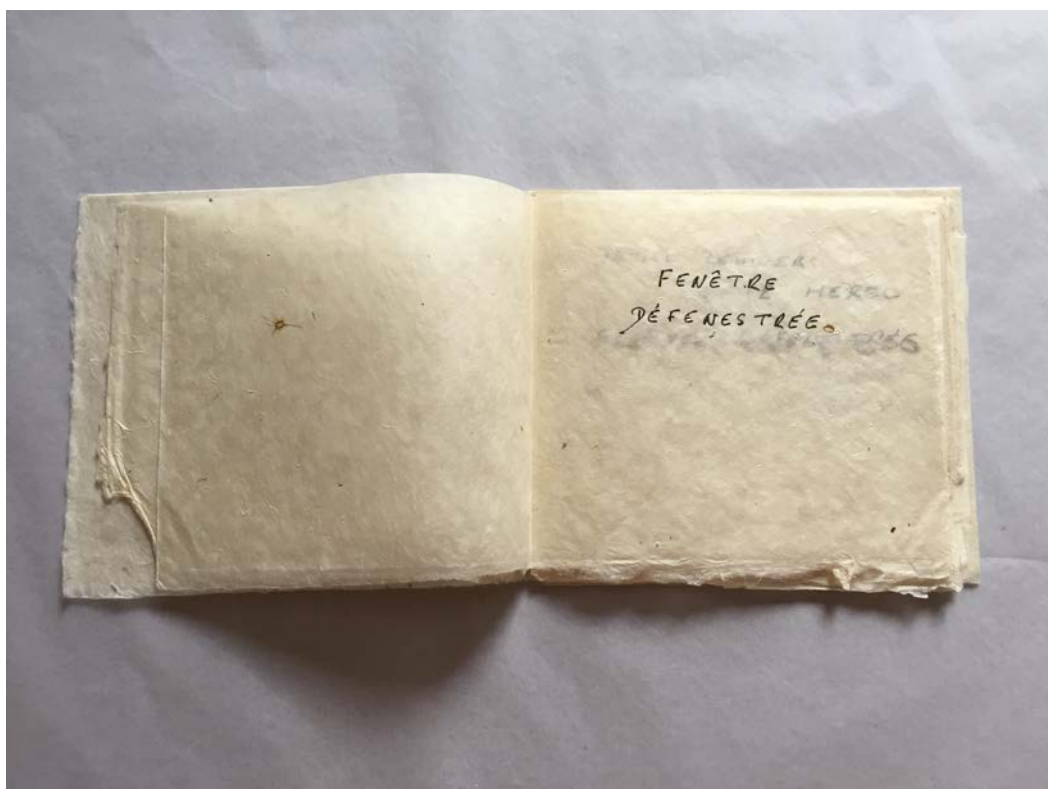
c)



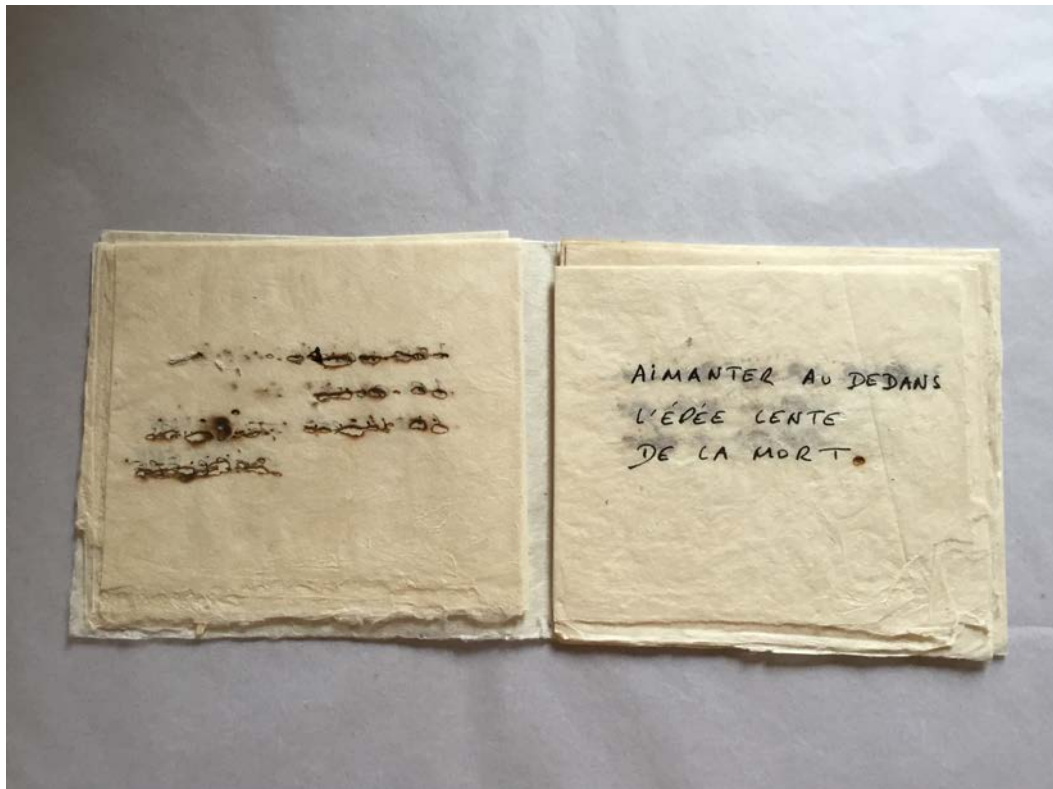
**Figure 10**

Petr Herel, Daniel Leuers (writer), *Fenêtre Défenestrée* (Melbourne: Petr Herel, 2003), 3/7, artist's collection, Melbourne.

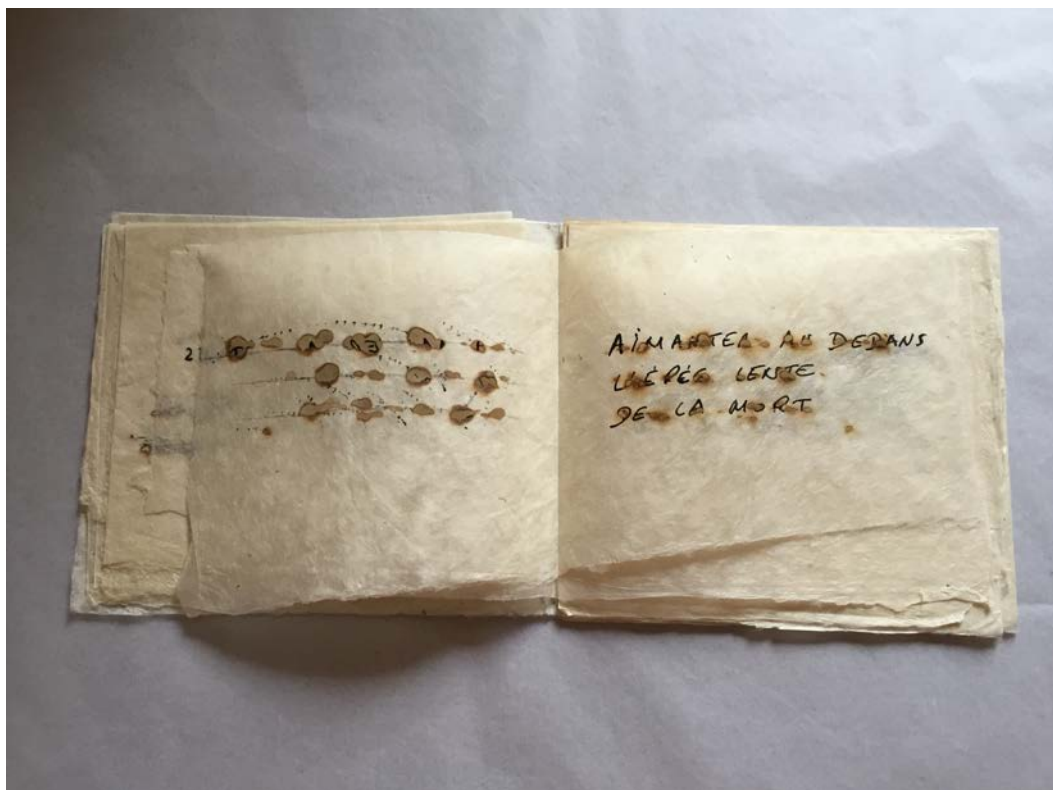
a)



b)



c)







Petr Herel, Dimitris Tsaloumas (writer), Jan Marius Tomeš (contributor), *Bárka = The barge* (Melbourne: Uncollected Works Press, 2013), 2/10, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

[illegible]

A two-page spread from a sketchbook. The left page is mostly blank with light, wispy pencil marks. The right page features a drawing of a small boat on a grid background. The boat has a red circle on its side and the number '47' written on it. The background is a dense grid of dark lines.



A hand-drawn sketch of a ship's hull cross-section on a grid background. The hull is labeled '1028-47' and features a red circular target. Text on the hull includes '1027', 'Large Cannon', '1027 (WRE II)', and '1028'. A dashed line indicates a path or trajectory.

Figure 12

Petr Herel, Antjie Krog (writer), Georges Lory (translator), Pascal Duriez (printer), René Tazé (printer), *Sisteme = Systèmes = Systems* (Bussy-le-Grand: m.m.éd., 2011), 27/30, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

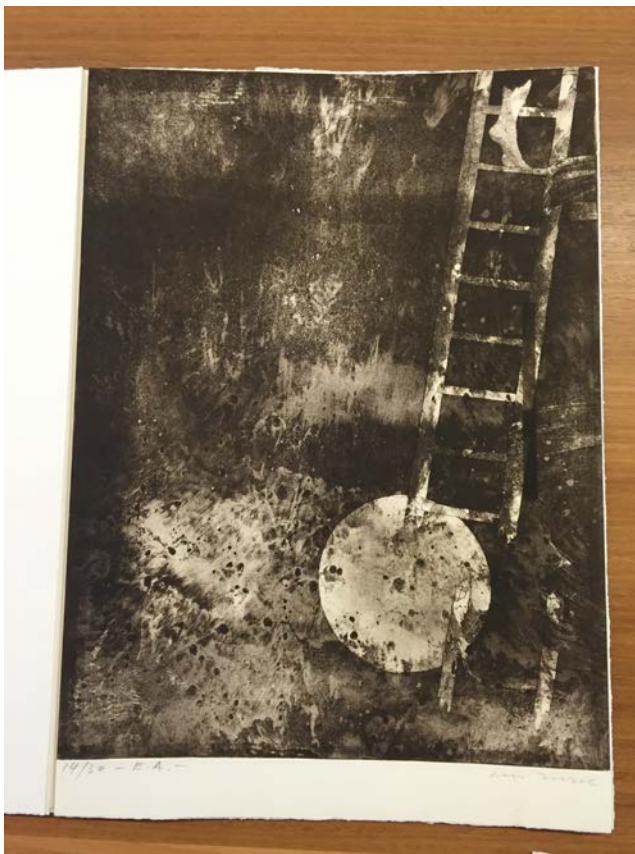
A watercolor illustration on a piece of aged, yellowed paper. The background features a faint grid pattern. In the lower right, there is a large, stylized compass rose with eight points, colored in shades of orange and red. To the left of the compass rose, there is a faint, sketchy outline of a ship's hull or a similar structure. The overall color palette is dominated by warm tones like yellow, orange, and red, with some darker, more muted colors in the background. The paper shows signs of age, including creases and discoloration.

b)



**Figure 13**

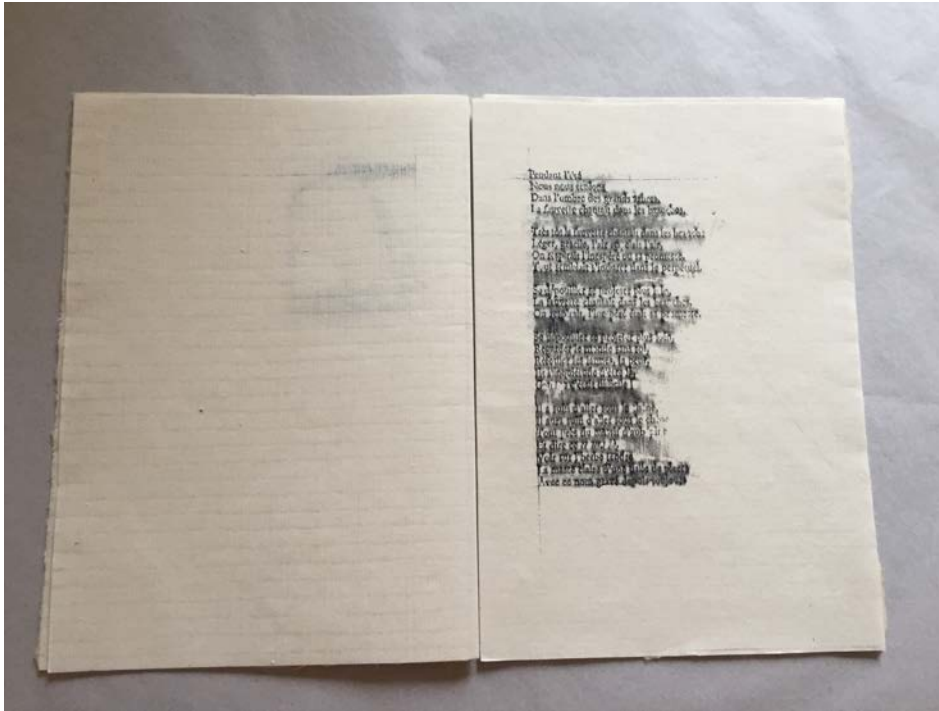
Petr Herel, Jules Supervielle (writer), George Bogin (translator), *Longing For the Earth* (Melbourne: Uncollected Works Press, 2008), 14/20, National Library of Australia, Canberra.



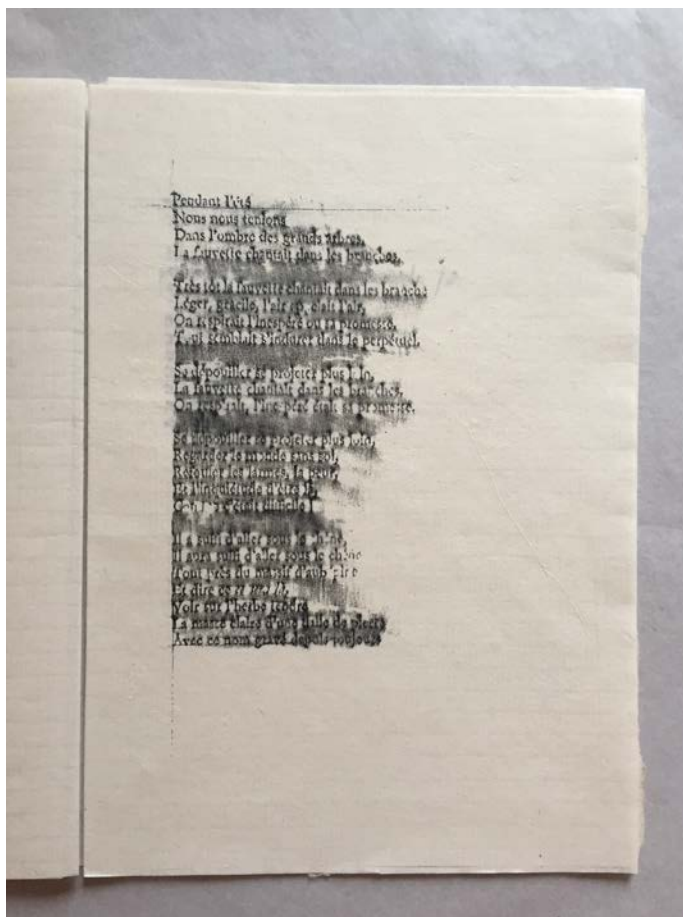
**Figure 14**

Petr Herel, Gaston Puel (writer), Thierry Bouchard (typographer), *Sous le Chêne* (Melbourne and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 2006-2008), 3/8, artist's collection, Melbourne.

**a)**



**b)**



c)

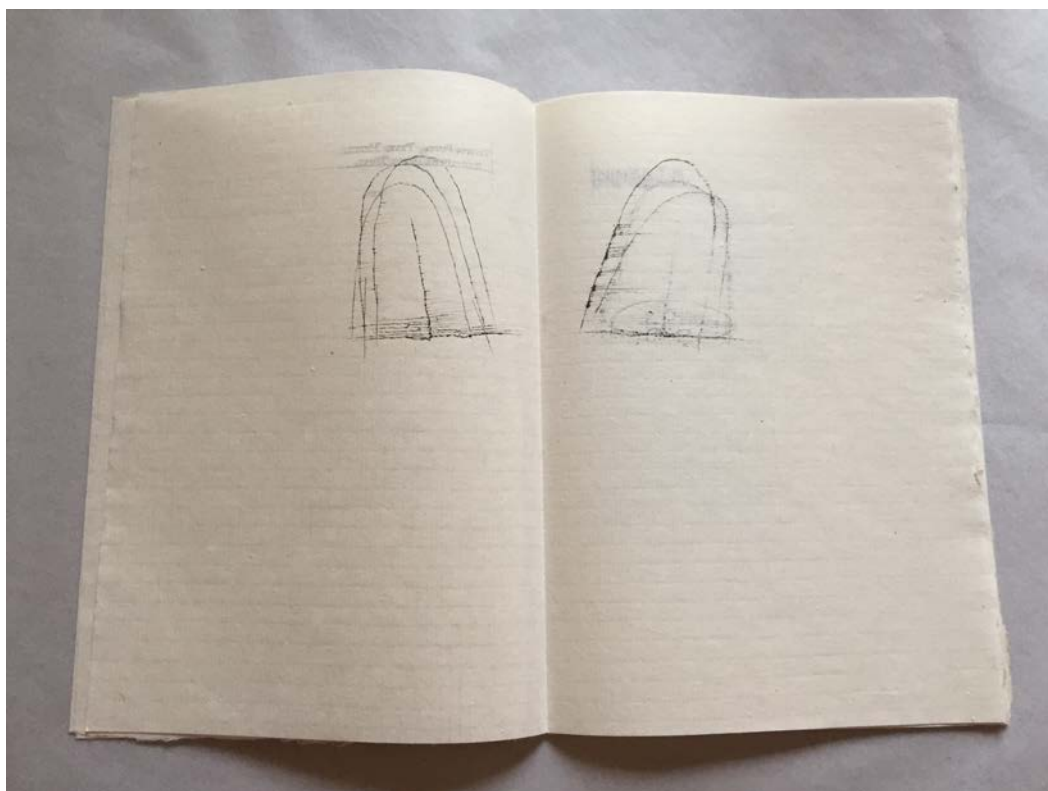
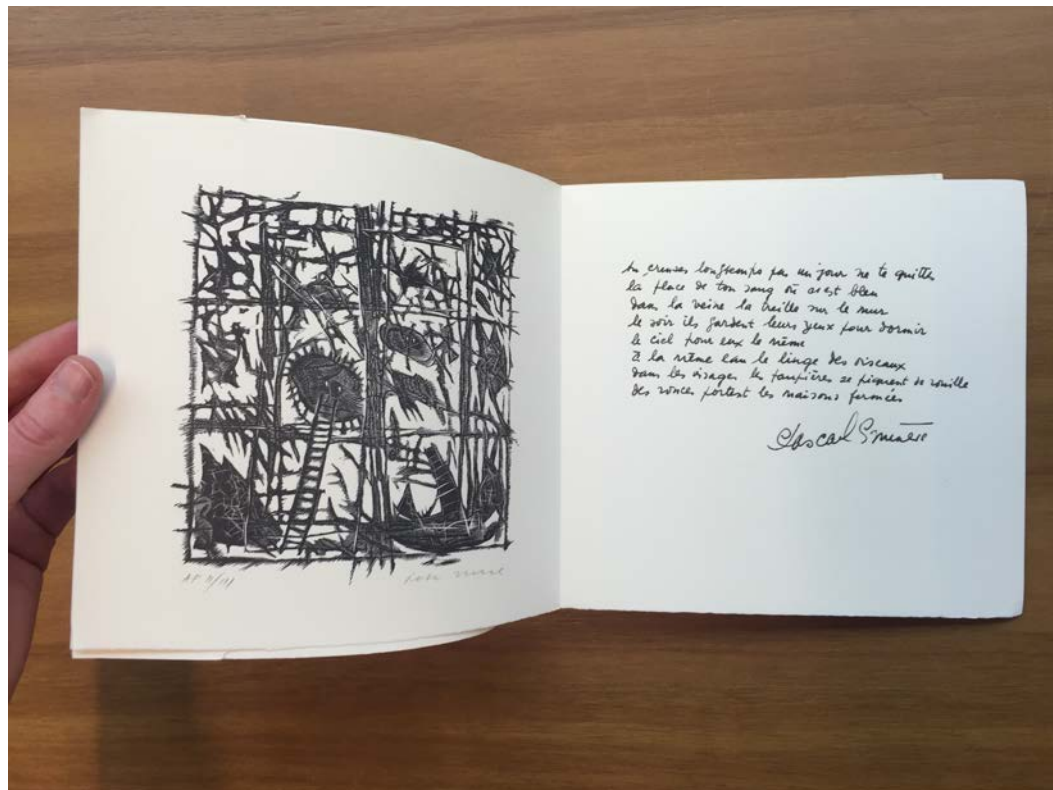


Figure 15



Petr Herel, Pascale Commère (writer), Yves Prié (printer), *Fenêtres la Nuit Vient* (Romillé: Éditions Folle Avoine, 1987), artist's proof 2/3, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



b)



Figure 16

Petr Herel, Thierry Bouchard (typographer, printer), *Rosedale* (Canberra and Losne: Labyrinth Press, 1989), 12/13, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

a)



b)



## Conclusion

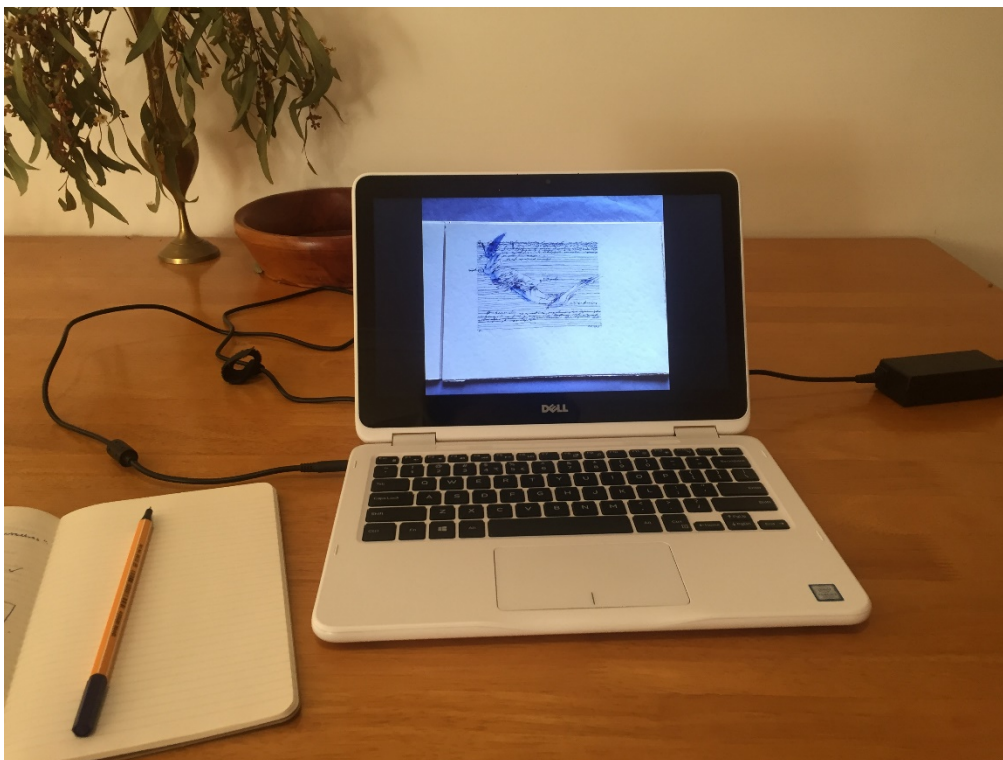
### Figure 1

Petr Herel, *Carnet d'un Malade*, 1978, one of two unique impressions, artist's collection, Melbourne (viewing of digital files).



### Figure 2

Petr Herel, *Carnet d'un Malade*, 1978, one of two unique impressions, artist's collection, Melbourne (viewing of digital files).

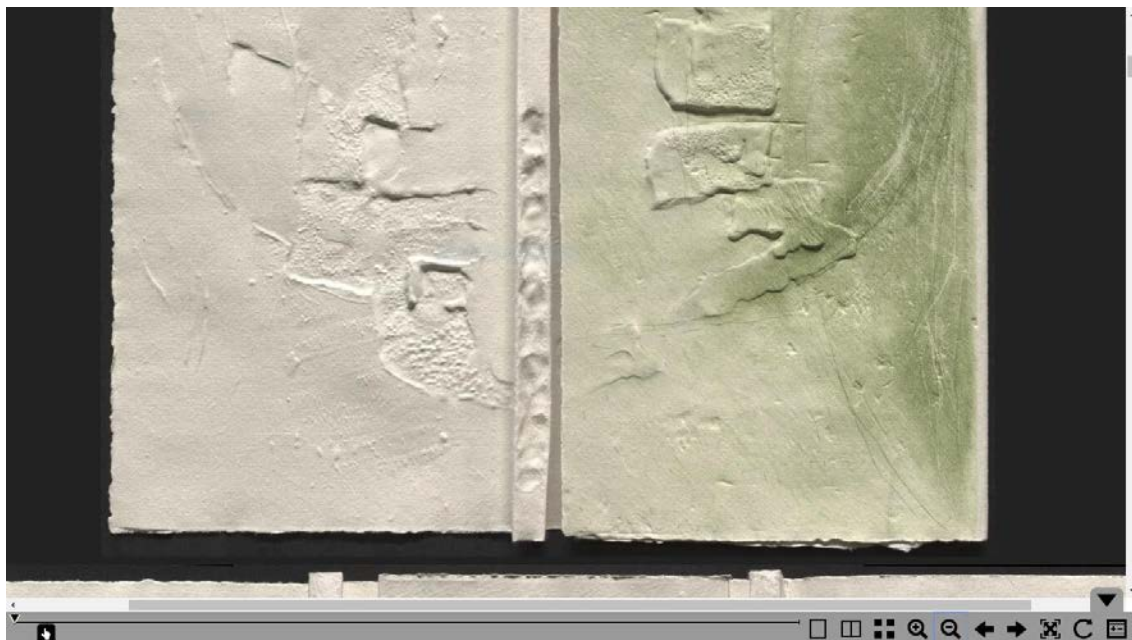




**Figure 3**

National Library of Australia, “Sur Le Pont Charles = Na Karlově Mostě,” Catalogue Record, 2017,

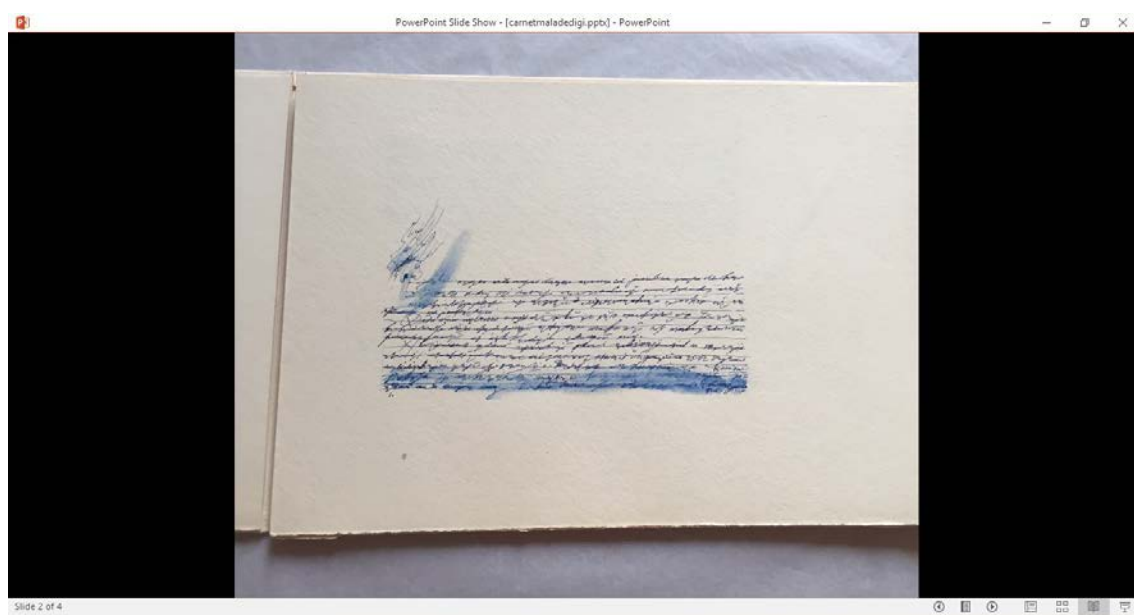
<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/7129240?lookfor=sur%20le%20pont%20charles&offset=1&max=234966>.



**Figure 4**

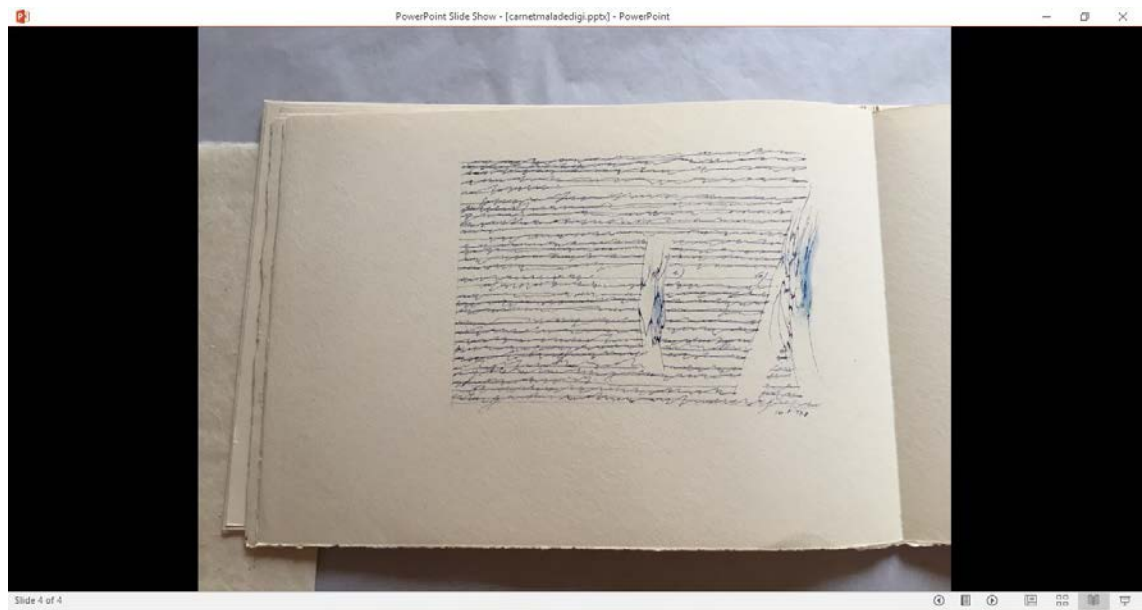
Petr Herel, *Carnet d'un Malade*, 1978, one of two unique impressions, artist's collection, Melbourne (viewing of digital files).

a)





b)



c)



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